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CARVEN FROM THE LAUREL TREE

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ESSAYS

By Theodore Maynard

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To
CECIL CHESTERTON

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The essay entitled 'The Revival of Poetry' was written originally as two articles, the first appearing, under its present title, simultaneously in the *Poetry Review* and *America,* the second in the *Magnificat* as 'The Heaven of the Poets.'

I must also thank Mr. W. B. Yeats, Mr. Hilaire Belloc, Mr. G. K. Chesterton, Mrs. Meynell and Mr. Ralph Hodgson for their courtesy, Mrs. Joseph Plunkett for a poem of Joseph Plunkett, Mr. Sturge Moore for allowing me to quote from 'Michael Field,' Messrs. Sidgwick and Jackson and the poet's executor for two passages from Rupert Brooke, and Mr. Meynell for his generosity in the matter of Francis Thompson.

THE MYSTICAL NOTE IN POETRY

IT is now a fashion with those well-fed, woolly, slightly artistic people, who twenty years or so ago, paraded their temperament and intensity, to pride themselves upon being mystics. Any Americanised Oriental who likes to advertise, any spiritualist or theosophist who takes the trouble to set up shop, is reasonably certain to have a considerable *clientèle*, who seek to escape from a gross world through they care not what wild avenues. But beyond these rather vulgar folk there are quite a number of nice poetic souls, stirred vaguely but powerfully, who seek a literary solace in the dreamy loveliness of the school of W. B. Yeats, 'Æ.,' and their kind, or—if they are ordered in mind—in a more or less philosophical form of symbolism, which they admiringly, but incorrectly, describe as 'mysticism.' Their springs are unquestionably stirred, though they wot not of the angel.

> O sweet everlasting voices, be still;
> Go to the guards of the heavenly fold
> And bid them wander, obeying your will,
> Flame under flame, till Time be no more;

Have you not found that our hearts are old,
That you call in birds, in wind on the hill,
In shaken boughs, in tide on the shore?
O sweet everlasting voices, be still.

R. L. Nettleship, a lucid spokesman for the more philosophically-minded, gives this definition of the subject in his 'Remains': 'The true mysticism is the belief that everything, in being what it is, is symbolic of something more.' Now that is a very good description of decent symbolism, but it has nothing to do with mysticism proper. For while symbolism is of the utmost value as an expression of mysticism, it is only the expression of the thing, not the thing itself. That is an experience remaining inviolably secret and personal. To the soul having the lonely consciousness of God.

Nec lingua valet dicere,
Nec littera exprimere:
Expertus potest credere
Quid sit Jesum diligere.

Francis Thompson, writing in his 'Ode to the Setting Sun,'

Even so, O cross! thine is the victory:
Thy roots are fast within our fairest fields;
Brightness may emanate in Heaven from thee,
Here thy dread symbol only shadow yields!

is speaking the language of the heart (or mysticism) in words which might have been uttered by St. John of the Cross, where the other modern poet (whose

name I have unhappily forgotten*) expresses only the language of the eyes—or symbolism:

I see His blood upon the rose,
And in the stars the glory of His eyes;
His body gleams amid eternal snows;
His tears fall from the skies.

I see His face in every flower;
The thunder and the singing of the birds
Are but His voice; and carven by His power
Rocks are His written words.

All pathways by His feet are worn;
His strong heart stirs the ever-beating sea;
His crown of thorns is twined with every thorn;
His cross is every tree.

Fine though that is, the poet has not won to the secret place which the mystic knows, where God, without form of words or speech, declares all Truth.

What, then, is true mysticism? That is perhaps the most difficult of all questions to answer, and if, in my attempt, I write with a Catholic bias, I do so not in a spirit of propaganda, but simply because it is the only way by which I know how to approach the subject.

Although the saints and mystics are the last fine flowers which blossom upon the Living Vine, and are the especial glory of the Catholic Church which has produced them, there never has been any formal

* I read this poem in a review of a book published six years ago, and while remembering the verses forgot the name of the poet, which meant nothing to me at the time. I have discovered, since writing this essay, that the forgotten name is that of Joseph Plunkett, who was executed in the Dublin Rebellion of 1916.

and official definition of either sanctity or mysticism. Yet, since the Church has crowned certain of her children for the virtue and the charity which they so splendidly achieved, such as have been distinctly approved by her may be accepted as showing to the world, by their lives, what it is that the Church understands by sanctity and mysticism. Concerning these there is nothing which can properly be called a history—their biographies and aureoles are all that have been left us. Each mystic is a separate star, although the sun around which they revolve is the same. No class in society has been quite without them. Popes, kings, queens and cardinals ride in that brave company, with merchants, soldiers, peasants, cooks, fishermen and labourers! Nor must we forget one public headsman, or

> St. Zita, the good kitchen maid,—
> She prayed and she prayed and she prayed and she prayed.

Each one of these souls, differing from the rest in station, culture, temperament and experience, has its own secret canticle to sing. No cast-iron definition can include them all, but one may say that mysticism, as practised in common by the Blessed, was their experimental knowledge of God gained through love of Him.

We are fortunate in having two supreme descriptive mystical poems in our language—Thompson's 'Hound of Heaven' and Crashaw's 'Hymn to St. Teresa.' The modern poet tells with true mystical particularity of the remorseless wooing by God of

the human soul, where Crashaw is concerned rather to sing of that extraordinary woman who reached such mystical heights as turn even the onlooker dizzy:

O thou undaunted daughter of desires!
By all thy dower of lights and fires;
By all the eagle in thee, all the dove;
By all thy lives and deaths of love;
By thy large draughts of intellectual day,
And by thy thirsts of love more large than they;
By all thy brim-filled bowls of fierce desire;
By thy last morning's draught of liquid fire;
By the full kingdom of that final kiss
That seized thy parting soul and sealed thee His;
By all the heavens thou hast in Him
(Fair sister of the seraphim!)
By all of Him we have in thee;
Leave nothing of myself in me,
Let me so read thy life that I
Unto all life of mine may die.

There are opponents of mysticism, men who, in spite of their sympathy with so much of the sweet graciousness of the saints, are yet prevented by a too pedantic love of philosophical definition from a proper appreciation of the Christian mystics. Some of them, indeed, would go so far as to deny altogether the existence of mysticism in the Church, because, for them, the thing begins and ends with Plotinus and the Alexandrian gnostics, and, accordingly, means the repudiation of humanity and nature and the atrophy of mind and will. It is the mysticism of Emerson's 'Brahma.'

If the red slayer think he slays,
Or if the slain think he is slain,
They know not well the subtle ways
I keep and pass and turn again.

Far or forgot to me is near,
Shadow and sunlight are the same;
The vanished gods to me appear,
And one to me are shame and fame.

They reckon ill who leave me out,
When me they fly, I am the wings,
I am the doubter and the doubt,
And I the hymn the Brahmin sings.

The strong gods pine for my abode,
And pine in vain the Sacred Seven;
But thou meek lover of the good
Find me and turn thy back on Heaven.

It must be conceded, and conceded joyfully, that these anti-mystics are right enough in their dislikes —for the type of mysticism which they condemn has been condemned repeatedly by the Church. Their overwhelming wrongness is their failure to recognise the existence of mysticism of another and a healthier school.

Now the normality of sanctity is a thing especially insisted on by the Church: that there is no man in the world who cannot become a saint if he but will, since the saint is not unique in kind (as a great musician, for instance, is unique), but only in degree. He is merely one who, exercising ordinary faculties and practising the virtues within the reach of any man, has succeeded to the point of heroism. He

treads the path of simple and humble duties; and though his soul may be snatched up to the seventh heaven and the vision of things unlawful for man to utter, his feet are firmly rooted in quiet soil.

Hence the saints' exquisite poise. They are not less human for having plumbed the deep sea of God, but have gained thereby a certainty and lightness of touch. St. Francis becomes the troubadour of the Queen of Heaven; St. Bernard, for all his sternness, is so pitiful for animals that no small bird flying from a hawk lacked a sign of the Cross from him to aid its escape; St. Catharine of Siena, mortified to extremity, smiles out of her pain as the lover of flowers and the fondler of little children; St. Teresa, though keeping her stateliness and fine manners to the end, plays her little flute and tambourine on feast days in her convent, where they may still be seen. Laughter is ever on their lips and fun in their hearts—even when it is not expressed in so racy and whimsical a fashion as it was by St. Philip Neri.

Far from the mystics wasting themselves in idle and vague dreams, they surely were among the most painfully lucid of mortals! Although St. John of the Cross sets out to write on perhaps the most abstruse and specialistic subject in the world, he succeeds in being more clear and scientific upon it than most philosophers could be upon sausages—did philosophers ever deal with so noble a theme! St. Teresa, for all her

> Little eagles and young loves, whose high
> Flights scorn the lazy dust and things that die,

was perhaps the most successful business woman of her day. More amazing still, St. Catharine was, even during her ecstasies, an exact and untiring worker, and while in the mystic state actually dictated letters, often of the highest political importance! As her secretaries have thoughtfully indicated those written in rapture, we are able to remark the saint's force and good sense while in the mystic state. Neither her heart nor her head nor her nerves were the worse for the love of God.

One of the most hopeful signs of our day is a very real modern revival of interest in mysticism. When this appears in verse—as it does in the work of so many contemporary poets—it is always the earnest of a renewed literary vigour and originality. Discounting all the crude and vulgar manifestations of it in the numerous pseudo-Oriental cults, the fact remains that men and women are turning back to long-forgotten fountains to draw of the sweet and bitter waters of the old Catholic writers. Even outside the Church is the impulse felt, and the studies of Miss Evelyn Underhill and Dean Inge—partial though they are in the one case, and with a tinge of unpleasantness in the other—have done much to stimulate a more general interest in the things of the soul. Even if the waters generally trickle thinly, they are constant. Ralph Hodgson's lyric, 'The Mystery,' exquisitely illustrates the new spirit in our poets.

He came and took me by the hand
Up to a red rose tree,

He kept His meaning to Himself
But gave a rose to me.

I did not pray Him to lay bare
The mystery to me,
Enough the rose was Heaven to smell
And His own face to see.

The mystical note is to be found in such dissimilar writings as those of Mr. Masefield and of Mrs. Meynell; and the divine theme is in their music, though thumped by the one on a Salvation Army tambourine, and given life by the other on the most delicate of violins, where love and science are as happily mated as in the *Adoro Te* of St. Thomas Aquinas.

'You never attained to Him.' 'If to attain
Be to abide, then that may be.'
'Endless the way, followed with how much pain!'
'The way was He.'

The potent and purifying influence of Blake, he who, as a child, saw God looking in through the window and never in manhood forgot the sight, hardly makes for mysticism according to our definition—broad as it is. The man was rather a prophet or visionary than a mystic proper, and with him may be grouped Browning, sometimes, and G. K. Chesterton, almost always:

The fields from Islington to Marylebone,
To Primrose Hill and Saint John's Wood,
Were builded over with pillars of gold;
And there Jerusalem's pillars stood.

Her little ones ran on the fields,
The Lamb of God among them seen;
And fair Jerusalem, His Bride,
Among the little meadows green.

Pancras and Kentish Town repose
Among her golden pillars high,
Among her golden arches which
Shine upon the starry sky.

The Jew's Harp House and the Green Man,
The ponds where boys to bathe delight,
The fields of cows by Welling's Farm
Shine in Jerusalem's pleasant sight.

She walks upon our meadows green,
The Lamb of God walks by her side,
And every English child is seen
Children of Jesus and His Bride.

It is Jacob rather than David whose voice is heard there—the first Isaiah, to be higher-critical for a moment, rather than the second: and though Francis Thompson had far more of David in him than had Blake (by the way, one can imagine Blake dauntlessly wrestling with God until dawn and the withering of his thigh), yet in his 'In No Strange Land' the seer is heard above the saint.

Not where the wheeling systems darken,
And our benumbed conceiving soars!—
The drift of pinions, would we hearken,
Beats at our own clay-shuttered doors.

The angels keep their ancient places;—
Turn but a stone, and start a wing!
'Tis ye, 'tis your estranged faces,
That miss the many-splendoured thing.

But (when so sad thou canst not sadder)
Cry;—and upon thy so sore loss
Shall shine the traffic of Jacob's ladder
Pitched between Heaven and Charing Cross.

Yea, in the night, my Soul, my daughter,
Cry,—clinging Heaven by the hems;
And lo, Christ walking on the water
Not of Genesareth, but Thames!

The sense of divine domesticity has come back to us, and the text is always 'It is not too hard for thee, neither is it far off'; for in the words Mr. Chesterton puts into the mouth of our Lady in his 'Ballad of the White Horse':

'The gates of Heaven are lightly locked,
We do not guard our gain,
The heaviest hind may easily
Come silently and suddenly
Upon me in a lane.

'And any little maid that walks
In good thoughts apart,
May break the guard of the three kings
And see the dear and dreadful things
I hid within my heart.'

When 'Heaven becomes a homely town,' the dullest suburb will take on a bright significance: and though some people will probably be shocked (for mystics commonly do seem blasphemous to the irreligious) the saints would have seen nothing dreadful in the thought of such a familiarity with God as

could prompt the Rev. R. L. Gales to conclude a baby's grace with

> Praise for tea and buttered toast—
> Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

The thought of this kind closeness of our God is at the centre of all mystical contemplation; for mystery is the exact opposite of mystification.

MYSTICISM AND THE OXFORD POETRY BOOK

THERE has always been an intimate connection between mysticism and poetry. Just as the human lover chooses the most beautiful and perfect words to give fitting praise to his lady, so the saint finds that song is the natural language for telling forth the love of God. The Bridegroom demands music as well as the bride, and the saint's ardour and tenderness kindle to a passionate flame. It is remarkable how many of the mystics have become poets. St. Bernard, St. Francis, St. John of the Cross, Blessed Henry Suso, and Richard Rolle of Hampole each

> Teach how the crucifix may be
> Carven from the laurel tree;

and St. Thomas Aquinas turns from the Summa, which only make him the doctor of the Church, to write his matchless hymns which prove him the lover of Christ.

Even when the mystics are not poets by achievement themselves, they are themes for poets. Romance seems to transfigure their sackcloth. One only has to remember St. Elizabeth of Hungary,

St. Brendan, St. Rose of Lima—whose very name rings like a lyric—St. Peter Celestine (the Hermit-Pope whom Dante, because of his burning honour for the Papacy, consigned to hell), Blessed Joan of Arc, and many more, to feel that these lived poetry even when they did not make it. The roses of legend cluster round their heads as the daisies grew at their feet.

But in our day, when mysticism is so fashionable and unfortunately means so many things, it is of the utmost importance, if we wish to preserve its significance and value, to detect the imitations, those moods of vague wistfulness or enchantment, which constantly claim its name. Hence a mere emotional exaltation before the outspread loveliness of the world, or an intellectual idealisation of beauty, do not in any sense constitute mysticism, although they are often thought so to do. 'The Heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth His handiwork'—*but* 'there is no speech nor language; their voice cannot be heard.' To the mystic, to him who has torn aside the veil and heard the voice of God in his soul, the whole earth is full of His bright and jewelled beauty, and the mountains and the hills break forth into singing. Such a vision is delicately etched by Father Tabb in 'Christ and the Pagan':

> I had no God but these,
> The sacerdotal Trees,
> And they uplifted me.
> *'I hung upon a Tree.'*

The sun and moon I saw,
And reverential awe
Subdued me day and night.
'I am the perfect Light.'

But this penetrating insight is not mysticism itself, but only one of the results of mysticism. Even when Crashaw exclaimed:

Love, thou art absolute sole Lord
Of Life and Death!

he was only recording another, though a deeper, effect of the personal and experimental knowledge of God which is the heart of mysticism. But because I may be accused of being too ecclesiastical and specialistic in my treatment of this subject, I am willing, since God is the sustaining reality of the universe, to broaden my definition by saying that mysticism begins with the fierce, unconquerable passion of the soul to pierce to Reality and is consummated in the union of the soul with Reality. "Too late have I known Thee, O ancient Truth!' prays St. Augustine. 'Too late have I loved Thee, O Beauty ever ancient and ever new! And behold Thou wast within, and I was abroad, and there I sought Thee, and, deformed as I was, ran after those beauties which Thou hast made.' Like him all the mystics lay aside the accidents of the thing in order to find its essential substance. For them roses fade and wither until they have found the Mystic Rose. They ponder over secrets. They pluck the 'Flower in the crannied wall' and cry:

Little flower—but if I could understand

> What you are, root and all, and all in all,
> I should know what God and man is!

Like Browning (greater as a mystic than Blake, even as he was greater as a poet), they know that

> There is an inmost centre in us all,
> Where truth abides in fulness.

This hunger for Reality is the final test of genuine mysticism. It seeks to break the 'barrier to eternity,' to ravish the unseen, to make its perilous escalade to God. Mrs. Meynell, writing 'To a Daisy':

> Thou little veil for so great mystery,
> When shall I penetrate all things and thee?

speaks for all the true mystics. These do not seek to weave a cloud of golden glamour round the soul, but to burst through the cloud to the Reality beyond.

Now in Christian mysticism the Ineffable descends to us and lays Itself within our hands. The Immortal puts on mortality, that the mortal may be clothed upon with immortality. God is born as a child. The sacraments make us all partakers of the divine nature. There is here no place for an esoteric doctrine, but man is given the strange road of humility.

> By each new obeisance in spirit I climb to His feet.

When, therefore, we come upon 'The Oxford Book of English Mystical Verse,'* and find that its

* *The Oxford Book of English Mystical Verse*; chosen by D. H S. Nicholson and A. H. E. Lee. The Clarendon Press.

editors can discover nothing better to say of mysticism than that it is ' intimations of a consciousness wider and deeper than the normal,' we know that they have not the root of the matter. That is not the language of the mystic, but the jargon of the practical politician! The mystic when he speaks at all of his experience aims at an absolute lucidity. He may stammer through the burden of overwhelming glory, his speech may fail him and snap like glass. But going through such a book one feels that, however great its fascination may be (and the fascination in this case is very great indeed), a fundamental failure to distinguish between symbolism, metaphysics and mysticism steals away half the value it might have possessed. A task of absorbing interest to me would be to analyse a number of the poems in turn and to assign them to their proper categories, but, fortunately for my readers, space prohibits such gigantic toils. Merely as an illustration, however, I take Shelley's ' Adonais.' Ignoring the personal facts about Shelley, and the incongruity of claiming as a mystic one who used ostentatiously to inscribe himself an atheist, I choose one stanza for a simple textual dissection. Reading

> The One remains, the many change and pass;
> Heaven's light forever shines, Earth's shadows fly;
> Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
> Stains the white radiance of Eternity,
> Until death tramples it to fragments,

we feel that here are lines that might have been written by St. Teresa. The next line might have

some mystical point if uttered by St. John of the Cross:

> Die—
> If thou wouldst be with that which thou dost seek!

We remember, however, that not 'death to the world' is sung here, as in the poems of the great Carmelite, but a pagan pyre, and pass on:

> Follow where all is fled!—Rome's azure sky,
> Flowers, ruins, statues, music, words are weak
> The glory they transfuse with fitting truth to speak.

. . . Then the mystic closes the book in chill disappointment. But if, being also a poet, he should persevere to the end he will wonder why that egoistic sceptic, Lascelles Abercrombie, is allowed to be so priggish in its pages, or why an originality-monger may rehash 'Abt Vogler,' with

> Nothing is lost: all that is dreamed or done
> Passes unaltered the eternal way,

when Lionel Johnson and R. L. Gales are excluded from this singing cloister. There are many other causes for wonder in this Oxford Book, but those I have pointed out will be sufficient, I imagine, to stun most people.

THE HUMOUR OF THE SAINTS

TO speak of the Saints as possessing humour will seem to many people a forced piece of special pleading. Burglars may be, in their leisure, admirable husbands; and professional politicians, good fellows, but their calling usually precludes them from honesty or a pedantic regard for veracity. In much the same way, while the Saints are easily imagined as humble, or ardent, or mortified, or compassionate, they are not readily credited with gaiety. Sounding brass they may sometimes be, but rarely tinkling cymbals; holy but not hilarious. Anything else but that. Granted

> The courtesy of saints
> Their gentleness and scorn,

steadfastness, charity and a burning courage; yet laughter and sanctity do not easily mix. This idea springs from a profound misunderstanding of the nature of holiness of heart, from a feeling that saints are divorced from humanity and carry their lives along alien ways. Their wan, unearthly beauty glows only upon a cathedral window and is lost if brought out into the daylight and the loud streets of the world. Kipling put it forcibly when he boasted that single men in barracks are rarely

plaster saints. The saints who grew before the Lord inside or outside barracks were made of anything but plaster.

Their infinite variety is astounding; kings and popes appearing at one end of the scale and artisans and servant girls at the other; St. Benedict Labré, who cultivated dirt, standing against St. Theresa, who changed her linen twice a day. But of all it may be said that gaiety was their staff. They went laughing to heaven, for, even more than courage, cheerfulness is the abiding mark of the cloistered soul.

In some cases, of which St. Aloysius is a type, we see only dark eyes alive with mystery. But though we do not catch the personal humour of such across the centuries, we may imagine that they were the cause of harmless merriment in others. The elaborate chilblain plaster of the Jesuit cadet surely was a well of mirth to his companions. And if the nurse of the precocious saint, whose name escapes me, was edified by his refusal to take mammary nourishment on Fridays, we may guess that she, or at least the child's father, was vastly amused. The monumental incompetence, however, of St. Joseph of Cupertino must have been enjoyed by the saint himself, or why did he name himself 'Brother Ass'? And Brother Juniper saw the point of his fantastic and engaging awkwardness. He it was who roared loudest over the affair of the pig's trotters.

Beyond the happy innocence which is the secret

of the child, there is the irony which is the secret of the universe, and to both of these every saint comes at last. St. Theresa was a conscious wit, sprinkling her letters and her conversation with pungent *mots*. During the intervals of administering impartial justice, writing the Utopia, confuting Tyndall, saying his prayers and being beheaded, Blessed Thomas More conducted a jocular correspondence with Erasmus and composed Latin epigrams. Here is a translation of one made by Thomas Pike and published in 1569:—

> None could persuade him Radishes to eat,
> Vertue abhors such kinde of luscious Meat.
> Casting about his dull unpleasant eye,
> He chanc'd fine tender Onions to espie:
> He snaps up those. Though Radishes a'nt good,
> It seems that Onions are a vertuous food.

St. Thomas Aquinas, when he wasn't writing his 'Summa,' made excellent limericks and even St. Bernard, that great enigma, a man so rapt in contemplation that at the end of his novitiate he was unable to say whether his dormitory ceiling was flat or arched; who in so many fields was the first man of his age, as scholar, preacher, poet and man of affairs; of whom Ernest Hello has aptly said that 'it is impossible to write the history of his life without writing that of the whole world during his lifetime'—even that prince of monks and of saints loved his little joke. 'Ah, Father Abbot,' said his muleteer by the lakes of Switzerland, 'why do you not admire the scenery?' 'My son, I was saying

my prayers.' 'But I can admire the lakes and the hills and say my prayers too.' 'Come,' was the response, 'I will make you an offer. If you can say one Pater Noster without distraction you shall have my mule.' Down went the man upon his knees: '*Pater noster qui es in coelis, sanctificetur*—and the saddle, too, Father Abbot?' 'No, my son, nothing!'

It is easy to hear the ringing laugh of St. Francis, for in every company he was the merriest man present. There was perhaps something more than good poetry in his personifications of 'Brother Sun' and 'Sister Moon'; and he may have been as glad in his discovery as was a modern friar I knew, who shook with joy at his jest in speaking of 'Brother Bacon' and 'Sister Sausage.' The early Franciscans were constantly doing and saying unaccountable things, but when St. Anthony preached to the fishes and Blessed Giles dispelled an unbeliever's doubts on the doctrine of free will, by playing a fiddle and dancing round the room, the whole cosmos stood still to watch the comedy.

In different vein was the advice of St. Louis to De Joinville, but very good advice nevertheless. 'No man except he be a very learned clerk should dispute with a Jew or a heretic; but let him smite with his sword and pierce to the midriff as far as the blade will enter.'

One of the richest of the saints in the matter of humour was St. Philip Neri. He who could never finish the words: *Cupio dissolvi et esse cum Christo*

without being snatched away into rapture; he who towards the end of his life said Mass in private so that he might dismiss his server for a couple of hours after the *Agnus Dei* while he made his Communion, was racy and whimsical to a degree. Did one of the Fathers of the Oratory appear to be in danger of growing puffed up by his eloquence? Then let him walk round the refectory bearing a monkey with a little gun upon his shoulder! Or he must carry Philip's favourite cat on a cushion behind its master through the streets of Rome! Lest anyone should think the fun of the best-beloved saint that ever lived was always at the expense of other people, we should remember his picnics for the Dominican novices when he urged the young friars to 'eat and grow fat.'

An almost roguish humour was the natural breath of the Middle Ages and of their saints. It peeped out from the carving of a choir-stall or a capital, from an illuminated letter or a tail piece in a Missal. The spirit that inspired the lovely Cornish carol

> When on the Cross hanged was I,
> When a spear to my heart did glance,
> There issued forth both water and blood
> To call my true love to the dance—

was also in the 'Mirror for Monks' where Blosius wrote 'Jesus makes a pleasant sauce for a poor and unsavoury dish.' It shone in the jewelled gaiety of Fra Angelico's 'Dance of the Angels'; it lives and moves still where the boys dance at *Corpus Christi* before the high altar in Seville.

Nor is this remarkable when we apprehend the abysmal depths of laughter in the Faith. The thought of the weak things of the earth confounding the mighty is as fundamentally comic, and comic for the same reason, as the sight of a bishop slipping on a piece of orange peel. And the strange humility of our religion receives its fulfilment in the Incarnation. For in the words of Mr. Chesterton's Christmas poem:—

Laughter like a lion wakes
To roar to the resounding plain,
And the whole heaven shouts and shakes
For God himself is born again—
And we are little children walking
Through the snow and rain.

What saint would not be merry in a world which God created out of nothing and where He founded His Church with a pun?

SANCTITY AND THE SANITARY INSPECTOR

IN the ages of Faith the average man, though probably he was not then unablutioned to any greater degree than he is to-day, felt in some dim fashion that a carelessness with regard to personal cleanliness did in certain instances constitute a *prima facie* case for sanctity. Like bodily asceticism, it did not by itself alone offer an absolute proof of holiness of heart, but it was popularly taken as presumptive evidence. To-day, neither fasting nor filth has the smallest honour paid to it. But the mediaeval man had a different standard of values. When St. Thomas of Canterbury was murdered and the monks found that beneath his costly robe his hair shirt was full of lice, a great cry rang through the Cathedral, 'A saint! A saint!' To this day at least one saint has a lesson in the Breviary which solemnly recounts among his other virtues the fact that for a period of some years he took no bath. Against this, one must admit, may be set St. Bernard's dictum, 'Poverty I love, but not dirt.' But it must be remembered, firstly, that St. Bernard was an aristocrat with an aristocrat's prejudices, and, secondly, that as an abbot he knew that the cloister must be maintained in strict order and decorum to exist at all. The idea must have

been prevalent in his age for him to have attacked it.

The current opinion, however, is summed up in the detestable proverb 'Cleanliness is next to Godliness.' Its advocates wear the white shirt-front of a blameless life. They will show you their faith by their works; and their chief—sometimes their only work—is washing well behind the ears!

It may be true that the majority of the disreputable people are not too clean; that the man who appears in the police court for larceny, or drunkenness, or wife-beating is generally unshaven and begrimed; but it is true that nearly all the essentially wicked people in the world are immaculate in their personal appearance, 'perfumed with myrrh, aloes and cinnamon.' Those, on the other hand, who are held up to us as exemplars by our religion—children and the poor—are almost universally dirty, and their happy indifference to mere physical cleanliness was the source of the admiration once given to a saint such as Benedict Labré. Innocence went to the making of mudpies. Charity was in the chapel cleaner of 'My New Curate' who saw no harm in a 'little blessed dust' upon the altar, and good sense in the first old wife who held that every human being must eat a peck of dirt before he dies! It may have been felt, too, that there was here also something of the ascetic antagonism to material comfort such as prompts the dying Trappist to breathe his last upon a cross of ashes. It may be only a fanciful notion, but I think I can

detect a satirical symbolism in the division of the sheep from the goats—sheep are much dirtier than goats.

Cleanliness may be good as a social custom, though the decay of Rome may be cited against the habit of taking too many baths; but there is not the slightest or most whimsical connection between being clean of hands and clean of heart. There is no reason, I grant, why these things should not go together; only we know from experience that they rarely do.

Moreover, this cult is quite modern, coming to us by our contact with the heathen East. I have heard it said that when it was first proposed to build bathrooms at Oxford the authorities opposed the suggestion on the ground that the terms only lasted eight weeks!

Perhaps it ought to be explained that I take baths, not indeed with superstition, but with reasonable regularity. It is true that I shrink from the icy water of winter; but, well, not even my depravity is heroic. While by instinct and upbringing I am on the side of an almost fastidious cleanliness, my reason and such remnants of humility as are left me rise in violent protest against sanitation gone insane. Our experts declare that it is unhealthy for a mother to kiss her child on the lips, and some Protestant bodies have begun to use individual Communion cups from which the wine symbolising for them the blood of God may be drunk without fear of a fellow Communicant's germs! If

this were all, however, we could afford to make merry over such stupid solemnity; but a scientific tyranny is stalking gigantic through the earth. The sanitary inspectors are forcibly opening the windows of the unhygenic poor, and middle-class busybodies are bringing to them soap, and their soapy pride and the vile cleanliness of eugenics. The Protestant proverb has been elevated into a religion with a set of new syllogistic dogmas. Cleanliness is next to Godliness. Cleanliness is a sign of Godliness. Cleanliness *is* Godliness. The social superiors of the poor speak of them with a deadly sneer as 'the great unwashed!'

I have called this religion new; but I am wrong—for it dates from the time of the Pharisees. *They* too made clean the outside of the platter and left the inward part full of extortion and wickedness; *they* condemned the Disciples because they ate with unwashen hands. Against *them* was the Divine anger kindled and the awful 'woes!' hurled. *They* made the point of the parable, where Dives sat in purple and fine linen, while Lazarus lay at his gate filthy and in sores. The Pharisees have come back to us tithing mint and anise and cummin in their hygenic, draught-proof synagogues, leaving undone the weightier matters of the law, judgment and mercy and faith. A protest must be made against their smug science. Perhaps it will come, as such protests usually do, in the person of some fierce and spotless St. Simon Stylites, raised high upon a pillar of filth as a sign before the world.

ON DRINKING SONGS

Nunc est bibendum (Hor. Lib. I., Car. XXXVII.)

WITH the advent of the social reformer the very word 'beer' seems to have taken on a sinister sound, and is as much tabooed in polite society as the word 'trousers' was once said to have been. This harmless and refreshing drink has become credited with the most devilish properties and characteristics, so that when it has to be discussed (and heaven only knows how much the thought of it disturbs the minds of meddlesome philanthropists!) it must be referred to under the *alias* of 'alcohol' or 'the drinking habits of the lower classes.' Officialdom has beer on the brain—which is quite the wrong place for beer to be.

There is little wonder, then, that conviviality is a lost art, and that in consequence the making of drinking songs has suffered a sad decline. 'Simon the Cellarer,' it is true, may still be allowed even among Nonconformists, but as it deals with 'Sack' and 'Canary' no real Puritan objection can be raised. In fact, these somewhat heady liquors are very probably considered to be teetotal drinks, like Port. At any rate, there is a pleasant and redeeming smack of archaism about their names. Beer,

however, is quite another matter. One may only sing of that in a music hall—and not too often even there.

Very delightful verses are still occasionally written about drinking, but generally these efforts have a purely literary inspiration and cannot be honoured with the name of drinking songs. Thus Charles Stuart Calverley wrote, somewhere about the middle of last century, an elaborate treatise upon 'that mild, luxurious and artful beverage, beer.' Yet in spite of the ode's noble apostrophe—

> 'Oh Beer! Oh Hodgson, Guinness, Allsopp, Bass!
> Names that should be on every infant's tongue!'

we feel that Calverly's main interest lies in his poem rather than in his tankard. The elegant undergraduate speaks rather than the toper.

And Mr. Housman, carolling—

> 'Malt does more than Milton can
> To reconcile God's ways to man,'

seems to find more satisfaction in a happy alliteration than in his ale. He may be writing about malt, but the maltworm's note is absent.

More recently the mild Mr. Masefield has led his swaggering pirates on the stage, decked with striped jerseys and cutlasses and (that nothing be lacking in their artistic get up) full of rum.

> 'Oh! some are fond of fiddles and a song well sung,
> And some are all for music that you lilt upon the tongue;

But mouths were made for tankards and for sucking at the bung,
Says the old, bold mate of Henry Morgan.'

The unfortunate thing about this cheerful poem is that pirates do not talk like this—at least, none of the pirates that I know do so.

Then Robert Louis Stevenson once created a pirate, not so gory and blasphemous as those who stalk about in Mr. Masefield's pages, but a very nice pirate all the same. Still, I don't think that—

'Fifteen men on the dead man's chest—
Yo-ho! ho! and a bottle of rum'

was exactly the kind of observation that John Silver and his companions would have been likely to make.

Songs of this type are all either offered with apologetic humorousness or an equally apologetic braggadocio. None of them comes within miles of catching the simple seriousness of the genuine boozer. With hardly an exception, modern drinking songs appear to have been written either out of pleasant affectation or in order to point a moral. Beer was not made to be moralised about, but to be drunk.

Those old drinking songs, in which the English language is so happily rich, are in a different class. Among all their countless numbers there is no trace of such a thing as self-consciousness. They were not written to prove that beer ought to be consumed, but merely to celebrate the fact of its consumption. Shamefacedness or defence are entirely lacking in them. The only thing to be uttered is a

paean of praise for a material blessing joyfully accepted.

'Back and side go bare, go bare!
Both foot and hand go cold!
But, belly, God send thee good ale enough,
Whether it be new or old.'

So wrote Bishop Still in the sixteenth century. But to-day we would draw long faces at such reprehensible remarks and talk solemnly about less beer and more boots—which is about as sensible as demanding less sun and more sandwiches! Perfect social reform casteth out conviviality.

I wonder what our advocates of intemperate teetotalism would say to this rollicking chorus?—

'I cannot go home, and I will not go home—
It's long of the oyle of barley;
I'll tarry all night for my delight,
And go home in the morning early.'

Such a note of vulgar human fellowship would be certain to scorch Mr. Cadbury's ears, could they but hear it. Indeed, I often wonder whether it is not the fellowship that he objects to even more than its companion drink. Did he but walk down Fleet Street arm-in-arm with Mr. Gardiner and Dr. Clifford bawling out—

'Tea! Tea! Glorious Tea!'

at the top of his voice, what man is there would not join in? Why cannot they sing

'Come, pass the ginger-pop around
And let us wet our noses;

It is the finest nectar found
Since Noah or since Moses—
With my iddly-ow, ti-rumpity-dow,
Since Noah or since Moses!'

at a P.S.A., with Mr. Arthur Henderson booming in with a stentorian bass and Mr. Philip Snowden with a ringing tenor? On the day that they do. . . ten million converts will flock to their cause.

But alas! the teetotallers have triumphed! If they have not altogether succeeded in putting down beer (in their sense of the term), they have at least succeeded in throwing a blight over our songs. If we have not become sober, we have become sad—and that is something! Mr. Chesterton has to ask plaintively who will write us a drinking song, and, upon getting no replies, has to set to work himself. But though writing some glorious verses in his attempt, he has, on the whole, failed through his inability to forget the earnest face of the Puritan, whose pale disgust is like a skeleton at his feast. He, too, is the victim of his environment. How can he sing the songs of Zion beside the waters of Babylon? Beer, to him, has ceased to be merely beer, but has become the touchstone of economics, politics and philosophy, so that the whole of our modern contempt for the poor can be set against the drinking of one honest half-pint.

'I knew no harm of Buonaparte and plenty of the Squire,
And for to fight the Frenchmen I did not much desire;

But I did bash their baggonets because they came arrayed
To straighten out the crooked road an English drunkard made,
Where you and I went down the lane with ale-mugs in our hands,
The night we went to Glastonbury by way of Goodwin sands.'

Even here the facts of the French Revolution and the tyranny of the countryside have to be dragged in, and the whole history of England flung down as a challenging gage.

One of the few genuine modern drinking songs was made when Mr. Belloc wrote,

'If I should be what I never shall be,
The Master or the Squire;
If you gave me the hundred from here to the sea,
Which is more than I desire—
Then all my crops should be barley and hops,
And did my harvest fail—
I would sell every rood of my acres, I would,
For a bellyful of good ale.'

But even Mr. Belloc can rarely achieve anything so single-minded as this. In an age of unbelief he has to testify to eternal truth with a rousing bar-parlour chorus, and lays his tankard about him as a truncheon in defence of the Catholic Church—

'So thank the Lord for the temporal sword,
And for howling heretics, too,
And for all the good things that our Christendom brings—
But especially barley brew!'

It is perfectly true that wine is intimately, although obscurely, connected with the Faith, and Mr. Belloc is quite right when he shouts out at the top of his voice that barley brew is one of the good things that we owe to Christendom; but this, though consoling to the soul and clarifying to the mind, certainly makes our drinking songs complicated. The boozer's thoughts ought to be on his pot, not on the Pope. What with having Catholicism bellowed in at one ear and Puritanism snuffled in at the other, the poor man in the pub must get sorely distracted at times. Cannot he be left alone with his beer in peace?

THE ART OF ALICE MEYNELL

IT is a relief to turn aside from the loud jostling streets of cities to a quiet meadow, gleaming under the summer sun, where into the silence rises the clear voice of one singing bird. There are also such refreshing spaces in literature, where, after empty debate and trafficking, the heart is consoled with loveliness. The professional entertainer, the vulgarian, the 'booster,' the record-seller, the man —or worse still the woman—with a purpose fill the market with their clamour; but the flowers are hid in shy places, and are easily to be missed by the inattentive eye. From modern wastefulness we may save a precious treasury of small books. They are always few in number and unobtrusive. The lily has neither need for gilding nor for blowing of her own trumpet.

Alice Meynell has during the last year published a pamphlet of verse and a small volume of essays. In an age when every author is expected to publish at least one book in every twelve months, one writer of unassailable distinction can only point to half a dozen volumes after a long literary life. Something better than bulk and quantity is given us, to those of us at least who weary of the pretentious

and the trivial, to those who are content to wait patiently for excellence.

In these pages—brooded over and lived into, before written—there is a delicate rhythm not to be caught by other than a delicate ear. 'If life,' she says, 'is not always poetical, it is at least metrical.' Mrs. Meynell is at her best and most characteristic in her commentaries, slight essays on such subjects as 'Rain,' 'The Colour of Life,' 'Composure,' and 'Solitude.' In these how keenly intuitive is her power of observation, how sweet her detachment! She has marked the exact note and modulation of the thrush and its variation; the woodland blooms and the shadows upon the grassy Downs are known and known exactly. Nothing escapes her: even carelessness must be carefully guarded.

Other hands have often turned the exquisite into the finicky, but in Mrs. Meynell austerity is wedded to a great and gracious spirit, a spirit of humour and of pathos and of laughter. Mysticism is here, but a mysticism that is gay. To the poet may be applied her own 'Wind of Clear Weather in England':

> How keen his choice, how swift his feet!
> Narrow the way and hard to find!
> This delicate stepper and discreet
> Walked not like any worldly wind.
>
> Most like a man in man's own day,
> One of the few, a perfect one:
> His open earth—the single way;
> His narrow road—the open sun.

One other 'delicate stepper and discreet' has for 'narrow road, the open sun.' She is not finicky but spacious. Read the first paragraph of 'The Horizon':

> 'To mount a hill is to lift with you something higher and brighter than yourself or than any meaner burden. You lift the world, you raise the horizon; you give a signal for the distance to stand up. It is like the scene in the Vatican when a Cardinal, with his dramatic Italian hands, bids the kneeling groups to arise. He does more than bid them. He lifts them, he gathers them up, far and near, with the upward gesture of both arms; he takes them to their feet with the compulsion of his expressive force. Or it is as when a conductor takes his players to successive heights of music. You summon the sea, you bring the mountains, the distances unfold unlooked for wings and take an even flight. You are but a man lifting his weight upon the upward road, but as you climb the circle of the world goes up to face you.'

In 'Hearts of Controversy' as in the earlier book lives the same finished art, but with the exception of its last two short essays, 'Charmion' and 'The Century of Moderation,' its pieces are more considerable in matter than her previous work. She becomes very definitely a controversial critic. Before criticism was *obiter dicta*, casual, suggestive; now vexed questions are asked and answered. But many of the wisest and wittiest passages are spoken in a stage 'aside.' How much humorous good sense is in her comment upon Matthew Arnold's

classification of the French as the people of 'ideas' and of the English as the people of 'practicality.' '*Practicality*,' she cries, 'ascribed to the nation that has the fifty religions! *Ideas* to the nation that has the fifty sauces!'

Again, speaking of Charlotte Brontë. Mrs. Meynell marvels at the way her freedom was gained from the bonds of Gibbon-English. 'It is less wonderful that she should have appeared out of such a parsonage than that she should have arisen out of such a language.'

What shrewdness is in this delightful antithesis:

> 'It is not to the wild light hearts of the seventeenth century that we must look for extreme conceits and for extravagance, but to the later age, to the faultless, to the frigid, dissatisfied with their own propriety. There were straws, I confess, in the hair of the older poets; the eighteenth century men stuck straws in the periwigs.'

In the four main essays in 'Hearts of Controversy,' Alice Meynell sits as a judge upon, in turn, Tennyson, Dickens, Swinburne, and the Brontës. In each case she does indeed get to the heart of the controversy. Discriminating between the loose admiration Tennyson received during his life and the looser reaction of neglect that has befallen him in our day, she strikes a just balance. 'He. . . had both a style and a manner: a masterly style, a magical style, a too dainty manner, nearly a trick; a noble landscape and in it figures something ready-made.' Again brushing aside all mean criticism of

Dickens' style and grammar, of his wild, and, to my mind, divine power of caricature, she reaches to the essential soul of the great Victorian. 'Nothing places him so entirely out of date as his trust in human sanctity, his love of it, his hope for it, his leap at it. He saw it in a woman's face, first met, and drew it to himself in a man's hand first grasped.'

To Swinburne, however, I feel that Mrs. Meynell is not so just. Reading her indictment, even a great admirer of the poet might find no word of reply. The case seems complete and unanswerable. Swinburne *did* only too often give us a jingle rather than poetry; his thoughts *did* have 'their source, their home, their origin, their authority and mission in. . . his own vocabulary and the passion of other men;' too much of his verse *did* come from 'a perfervid fancy rather than an imagination.' All this we must grant. But his great genius must not be judged by 'Dolores' or even by the choruses from 'Atalanta.' These are of his most amazing but not of his best work. Moreover, it is cheap to charge him with an absurd couplet (hackneyed beyond endurance) written in youth, or to pour contempt upon him because 'foam' and 'flame'—words like these —are too frequently used to deck out his verse. Swinburne as well as Tennyson is suffering from a reaction, but I venture to think that his place in English song will ultimately be reckoned higher than that of Tennyson or many more of the lordliest companies of the poets.

Economy in space must be offered for my excuse

in jumping away from the argument in order to quote, from the essay on Charlotte and Emily Brontë, a page which may appear to confute my own opinion. I leave the regard for appearances to those who mind such matters, and take only for its own sake a fine and illuminating passage:

> 'You may hear the poet of great imagery praised as a great mystic. Nevertheless, although a great mystical poet makes images, he does not do in his greatest moments. He is a great mystic, because he has a full vision of the mystery of realities, not because he has a clear invention of similitudes. . . . A great writer is both a major and a minor mystic, in the self-same poem; now suddenly close to his mystery (which is his greatest moment) and anon making it mysterious with imagery (which is the moment of his most beautiful lines).
>
> 'The student passes delighted through the several courts of poetry, from the outer to the inner, from riches to more imaginative riches, and from decoration to more complex decoration; and prepares himself for the greater opulence of the innermost chamber. But when he crosses the last threshhold he finds this midmost sanctuary to be a hypaethral temple, and in its custody and care a simple earth and a space of sky.'

Mrs. Meynell's love of simple and wide effects: her art which, like her religion, gives the freedom of a law; her aloofness—all these mark her off from her contemporaries. Many of them write exceedingly well, but they are implicated in barren affairs. They sit at their desks with an eye on the

clock which must not move more quickly than their scribbling, post-haste pens. They serve their causes, and often wage noble battle, but the ephemeral happening which called forth this poem, or the crank or politician who was confuted by that article are unsubstantial. When forgetfulness takes them away. the journalism of their period—though it be literature also—must go with them. This Mrs. Meynell knows. But 'who of the wise would hesitate? To be honourable for one day—one named and dated day, separated from all other days of the ages—or to be for an unlimited time tedious?' She herself has made her choice honourably. The contemplative of letters, she lets the world go by. The swords of soldiers receive only the aid of her dedicated cloistration; but her eyes are fixed upon the reality they struggle for. Her reward is that of all the prose writers of the Twentieth Century. she is the one most certain of immortality.

THE DRAMA OF THE DRAMATISTS.

THERE is a great and lonely name which, passing from among us, has left a heritage not only of poetry but of paradox. There had been successful literary collaborations before, though rarely in metrical drama, but no collaboration in which the identity of the artists was so completely sunk as in the case of the two ladies who were known to their readers by the name of 'Michael Field.'

Here were souls who, though they had been by circumstance and choice decadents of the decadents, never, in the opinion of those best qualified to judge, committed in all their lives a really serious sin; dramatists who enacted a drama richer and more powerful than any that they ever made; poets, who, after they had learned to write poetry, learned at the last how to live it. Yet they brought with them into the Church not a little of their old pagan loyalties, rounded and purified by their new love. 'Something changed. . . as when the sky first kindled into stars.' Beauty was the abiding thing, whether they served it as priestesses, or knowing their vocation made it serve their God.

There were many signposts upon the Pilgrim

Way; many milestones to mark their passage: first the death of a brother and uncle; then (a curious token!) a dog who saved their sanity and had his tribute in the strangest book of animal poems; later the discovery in the ecclesiastical liturgy of the thread of sacrifice binding together Paganism and the Faith; and at last pain which, unexplained by Greece, was revealed by Calvary.

The period of transion was gradual and the verse written upon the road holds only their renunciation:

> 'I love but Love, yet must I change my god. . .
> Thus it must be—is it not ever thus?
> Where the Madonna spreads her shining Child
> We are not blest, there is no joy in us:
> But we are broken, but we are renewed
> When, lone as that first Shepherd of the wild,
> The God spreads out His arms on Holy Rood.'*

Not easy was the way to such feet, and not attained except by a strange humility and a stranger pride. With their own Lethington of 'The Tragic Mary' they could say, though the text takes on a deeper meaning, 'I must love my God humanly, not with stiff constancy, but with every mood I have.'

The theme of the ensuing drama is so sublime, that the plainest words shall suffice to tell it.

During 1912 Edith Cooper learned that she had a cancer in her breast. In order to miss no step of her *Via Crucis* she steadfastly rejected the mercy of morphia: love must be heroic. Throughout her illness Katherine Bradley (they were always

* *Wild Honey*. Fisher Unwin.

'Henry' and 'Michael' to one another) nursed her with a complete devotion. Before death came to Henry, Michael discovered a worse cancer in her own breast. It was a sacrament and a secret shared only with her doctor and her spiritual director. So perfect was the silence that the patient died with no suspicion of the agony endured by her serene nurse. On the day of Henry's death Michael had a seizure which revealed her secret to the world.

Lonely and crippled by pain her courage never faltered; accepting every stroke meekly and gladly, like her niece, she too refused injections and embraced her cross with ardour. Who hearing the note of exultation in her song guessed what it was that Katherine Bradley bore as a 'bundle of myrrh?' Reticence made drama more poignant.

It is said of her:—

'The Cross shall be on her breast as a bundle of myrrh.'

'I have loved odours well,
Loved frankincense and hydromel:
The angels know I have been very far
After where wild roses are;
And celled morsels of ambergris
Have risen up to my heart as peace.

Will the Cross confer
One day with my breast as a bundle of myrrh?
This would be, if I would let,
Rather as an English violet,
That would make all my bosom's room
A very murmur of perfume—
This would be, if I would suffer it.'*

* *Mystic Trees.* Eveleigh Nash.

To the day of her death she never missed receiving Holy Communion. Living in a cottage in the grounds of Hawkesyard she would not suffer her Lord to visit her, but was carried each morning at seven o'clock to the Priory Church. But the imminence of a longer journey woke her very early in the dawn of a September day in 1914. Rising, she asked to be dressed at once to be ready for Mass. As her attendant was about to lift her into her chair, Katharine Bradley fell back upon the floor dead. When half an hour afterwards the priest arrived she was lying with her head in the lap of a sister of mercy, and he was struck with remembrance of the great *pietà* of Francia, reproduced before him in the living and the dead.

'Michael' had always dreaded having to die in bed surrounded by a crowd—and she died upon the naked floor. In this, and in the facts of her so-long-concealed cancer and her burial upon St. Michael's Day, God showed His exquisite courtesy to one who had given Him a love which knew no limits to its generosity.

'Michael Field' always had a secure literary reputation, but the work issued under that name never circulated very widely. In part this was due to the prohibitive price of the superbly printed volumes; in part to the fact that the classic dead who lived again in their pages could be only sere leaves stirred by the wind to all but a few readers. The dramas were not written for the stage, and though powerful and shot with beauty make hard reading. Fine as were

many of the Sapphic translations, and the lyrics Pagan and Christian, the best things were the dramas. The slow movement (the solemn pageantry of the sonnet or the almost rarer dignity of blank verse) was aptest to the genius of 'Michael Field.'

Pagans they had been, knowing, unlike many of their contemporaries, their philosophy to the beginning and end.

> Silenus drew me to an oak-tree root
> He taught me in a language like a song.

Though later they knew 'the right, true way of singing with reserve,' they did not altogether scorn the oaten flute or the once-loved reeds. With diffidence were the last three volumes of plays containing 'The Accuser,' 'Tristan de Léonois,' 'A Messiah,' 'Borgia,' 'The Tragedy of Pardon' and 'Dian' sent to the press. Not with the old pomp, but in plain covers and anonymously were these volumes published. A preface is given which while intended as a shield is full of symbol to those who have its clue: 'The author of these books of drama is dead. He had been slowly dying for some years; then, of a sudden, he started on a journey of desire to Rome, that he might reach it before he died. Soon after his arrival death came; and he is buried in an uninscribed grave under Roman cypresses.'

So the drama ends, with a darkened stage and whispers more tense and terrible than swords. The

splendour of passion was changed into the meekness of pain, to the contemplation of the divine face, and the soft rustlings of the wings of peace.

THE REVIVAL OF ENGLISH POETRY

FOR the last twenty years or more poetry has been left to languish in the dungeons of derision by the English. The very nation which has produced more great poets than the rest of the world has treated its poets worst. A superficial critic might, and in fact frequently does, ascribe this unhappy state of things to the glut of poetasters whose immortal works are issued (for a consideration) by careless publishers, and are at once allowed by a still more careless world to drop into the oblivion of the fourpenny box. Yet the whole blame must not be laid to the door of those Miltons who, if inglorious, are by no means mute. Indeed, rightly considered, the fact of a multitude of indifferent poets, existing in our midst is, given also a few good poets, a very healthy sign. It at least proves that the practice of the art of song must be normal and satisfying to men, since it is the art which men most persistently essay, even when they have in it no grain of aptitude. Minor poets should, and very often do, prove the existence of the major, whose admirers and imitators they are.

No, the real reason for the decline of noble verse lies in the fact that toward the end of last century, the poets only too often wandered in unclean places. More, they frequently wore their hair long, affected velvet coats, and had debts. Dowson died of drink, Davidson by his own hand, and Wilde in the odour of infamy. Even the more respectable poets showed themselves to be poor fellows in the affairs of life. Did not Francis Thompson sell matches and take opium? Was not the head of Lionel Johnson so weak that a mere fall backward from a chair in a public-house proved sufficient to smash it? The Englishman, proudly conscious of a harder skull, liked neither the strange vices of the poets nor their fantastic virtues, so that when a black scandal raised its head, he reminded his children that he had 'told them so,' and was glad to see poetry crash suddenly and, as appeared, finally into almost universal contempt.

But now the poets have very largely come back again into their own. Even the stout, phlegmatic, middle-class person has begun dimly to feel that the times call for something more than a leading article: that Armageddon and the trump of doom, Michael and his angels in battle with the dragon, call for an utterance richer and more terrible than the plain stuff of prose. The days are epic, but where is the singer of the epic?

Along with the renewed sense of the need of poetry has come the vision of our young poets washed in the awful font of war. The souls that

were rotten with decay are now made romantic by danger. Such secret sores and sins as they may have had once are forgotten in the sudden blaze of their glory. Their names now ring of death and the splendour of arms, and their poetry is ended and made complete.

> Blow, bugles, blow! They brought us for our dearth
> Holiness, lacked so long, and Love and Pain.
> Honour has come back as a king to earth,
> And paid his subjects with a royal wage;
> And nobleness walks in our ways again;
> And we have come into our heritage.

The whimperings of the minor poets, the sad little men whose souls were sick, are heard no more; but from wild waste places comes upon the wind a great cry of praise. We were better than we knew. Our pessimism has fallen from us like a sheath, for it had never, thank God, really reached our heart. There ran the blood tempered by our kindly fields and abiding hills, whence was drawn, all unwittingly, 'a flaming valiancy of soul.' The new spirit is shot and coloured with the beatitude of the English country-side, where one sees with reopened eyes 'the lands of stubble, and tall trees.' With something of the glad note of discovery Geoffrey Howard can write his lovely sonnet, 'England':—

> O she is very small and very green,
> And full of little lanes all dense with flowers
> That wind along and lose themselves between
> Mossed farms and parks and fields of quiet sheep;

And in the hamlets where her stalwarts sleep
Low bells chime out from old elm-hidden towers.

Even in death do these things endure.

If I should die, think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England.

wrote Rupert Brooke, dying and giving to Lemnos a new beauty, thoughts of the cool woods, the wild hedge-rose and the deep bounty of our soil. With the same finality 'Edward Melbourne' sang his song 'Before Action,' falling a few weeks later in the Somme advance.

I that on my familiar hill
Saw with uncomprehending eyes
A hundred of Thy sunsets spill
Their fresh and sanguine sacrifice,
Ere the sun swings his noonday sword
Must say good-by to all of this:—
By all delights that I shall miss,
Help me to die, O Lord.

It is a startling fact that the three finest of the poets directly produced by the war have all died in the war. They were crowned with the laurel and then sealed to the grave with a blazing, splendid kiss. Rupert Brooke, 'Edward Melbourne' and Julian Grenfell have gone, leaving us an imperishable legacy. With dramatic irony the *Times* on May the 28th, 1915, announced Captain Grenfell's

death from wounds, and on the same day published his poem 'Into Battle':

And when the burning moment breaks,
And all things else are out of mind,
And only Joy of Battle takes
Him by the throat and makes him blind,

Through joy and blindness he shall know,
Not caring much to know, that still
Nor lead nor steel can reach him, so
That it be not the Destined Will.

The thundering line of battle stands,
And in the air Death moans and sings:
But Day shall clasp him with strong hands,
And Night shall fold him in soft wings.

Ruskin, who hated war, declared nevertheless that war is the mother of the arts. Whatever may be the effect of this war upon music and painting and the plastic arts, there can be no question that poetry has awoken to a loud réveille. Through fierce fires men are returning to a new simplicity, to the love of elemental things, to 'Mother Earth and Fatherland'; and with the clearer vision has come the perception of spiritual things. It is difficult to gauge accurately a tendency, for that is all that is abroad at present, but one may notice a growing Catholic sentiment in poetry. In an age when belief was thought to be failing, it is much to find, as we so repeatedly do find, a religious instinct healthy enough to materialize vividly the unseen.

True religion, like true poetry, may be at once distinguished from the false by a very simple test;

whether or not it loves and deals with elemental things. One can tell by the *feel* if it is genuine. Thus our Christian revelation gives us symbols which are at once simple and satisfying—indeed which are, quite apart from their symbolic value, the simplest and most satisfying objects men can know: bread and wine, and water and oil—where false religions, when they adopt plain symbols at all, choose for their spiritual tokens some such emblem as a serpent trying to swallow its own tail—though even a serpent would hardly find a meal of this sort so simple or so satisfying as it looks!

In just the same way all good poetry stands rooted in the humble and abiding earth, finding its permanence in bread that sustains, in wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil that causes his face to shine. Of all poets, perhaps Virgil and Wordsworth stand out as possessing in the highest degree this direct touch with the familiar and elemental, but all true poets must and do share this calm passion. Decay is marked when the search begins with Wilde for Pasht and the deities of the night, the exotic odours, the tapestries and torches of Babylonian temples.

Now while one cannot expect from English poetry, which long has been so unhappily severed from the life of the Catholic Church, a full realization of the unity between faith and poetic fervour, there still remain certain attitudes from which a tendency may be gathered. Among these may be classed the hearty anthropomorphism, the almost exuberantly

vivid materialization of the spiritual, which seems to be native to the good artist. John Davidson, for example, being the child of Victorian scepticism, tried to write a poem in praise of the Darwinian biological theory; moreover, he had much more of bitterness and despair than the healthy virility of such a man as Huxley could know. But when Davidson wrote his 'Ballad in Heaven'—and it was his finest poem, just as his excursion into versified science was his worst—he had, in order to imagine Heaven at all, to imagine it as monstrously solid and full of gorgeous music and the thundering tramp of a host whom no man could number. One can almost see in it the shape and colour of evil:

> The slow *adagio* begins;
> The winding sheets are ravelled out
> That swathe the minds of men, the sins
> That wrap their rotting souls about.

To Davidson, in his dull and doctrinaire moments, Heaven might be utterly non-existent; to Davidson, when the divine inspiration held him, Heaven had to be alive and charged with apocalyptic splendours.

To the faith of the Middle Ages these things were taken for granted, equally by the austere Dante and by the dissolute Villon. They shared the same vantage spot and saw

> Paradis peint, où sont harpes et luths,
> Et un enfer où damnés sont boullus.

To them 'the city lieth four-square . . . the length and the height and the breadth thereof are equal'—surely the acme of solidity! But even the

moderns, looking up from their desolation, picture Heaven hardly less vividly ; and though they are only able to set the conscious effort of a *picture* against the casual certainty of a *vision*, the fact that they have to accept our paraphernalia should give us the consolation of knowing that the poets will one day be the readiest of men to turn from the shadows of the Faith to its eternal substance.

POETS' PROSE

HARDLY one writer has proved himself a lord of prose without first learning the splendour of his art from poetry, his nurse. Here and there may be found one who can achieve good, honest stuff, strong, dignified and vigorous; now and then a Cobbett, owing nothing to the schools, who, by sheer force of the masculinity of his genius, rises to mastery of language unguarded by the golden ægis of verse. Over such an one we can marvel, applauding his power while sadly speculating as to what he could have done with more culture or less prejudice. Assuredly much would have been lost had his training and character been other than they were. Though we might still possess the 'History of the Protestant Reformation,' or even the 'Rural Rides,' would his 'Advice to Young Men' be so full of startling sagacity or 'Cottage Economy' so much to the point? In the providence of God there is a place for the roll of thunder as well as for the singing of choirs of birds, but in no orchestra can they be combined. The woods are silent in a summer storm.

The finer and more delicate graces of the prose writers are almost invariably derived from song. Beauty with its cadence and rhythm, its felicities

of thought and phrase, walks majestically apparelled through their pages. Her musical footfalls are only the echoes of poetry, who never ceases to bless any who have ever been her votaries. The most jealous of the Muses is in this matter the most forgiving. And the lustre of the bard is never quite eclipsed though, turning philosopher or ascetic, he seek newer shrines.

At the breasts of poetry prose must nuzzle himself to drink if he would grow up to be a lovely boy and a strong man. What a host of historians and essayists and orators have been nurtured in those maternal arms! The Roman heads of Addison and Macaulay have rested there. A young and less saturnine Swift was weaned by her. The ponderous form of Johnson—be it recorded in grateful mirth—lay poised as easily as a feather against that bosom. If he was destined for cyclopean tasks, to put to shame forty French Academicians and to rout the world of wit at the Mitre in a tempest of argument, he never ceased to love his holy mother. If Lamb sought for roast pig and Mrs. Battle at whist; if Coleridge became a metaphysician; if Morris preached hot gospel upon an orange box at Hammersmith, they remained poets at heart throughout their lives. Whether they write romances, or art criticism, or merely the glorification of Whiggery, verse claims her sons. Whether religion or politics or bread-and-butter calls them their laurels wither not. Carlyle is alone in his mood of black and bitter scorn. Others look wistfully from

their choir-stalls or professional chairs or pulpits towards eyes that were dear in their youth. The host of modern novelists who began as poets—Compton Mackenzie or Maurice Hewlett or Ford Maddox Hueffer—must think regretfully of early lyrics sacrificed for so many fat cheques. Possibly Hall Caine would rather be writing sonnets and Charles Garvice odes than popular fiction. Meredith certainly carried 'Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth' in one pocket, while 'The Egoist' was in the other. Stevenson smuggled a strange contraband of ballads on board the pirate lugger. And Thomas Hardy has offered a belated repentance in his old age. But not all escape the tragedy of the successful-disappointed. Rarely is an Alice Meynell born to serve poetry and prose with equal fealty and to achieve so exquisite a distinction in each.

Though there is a danger to poetry when poets put their hands to prose—the danger of no retrogression—at least prose receives an enrichment which is not altogether at the charge of poetry. Milton must become a pamphleteer and Dryden and Shelley critics. (The ideal faithfulness of Browning and Tennyson to metrical literature is as remarkable as George Bernard Shaw's eccentric abstention from it.) In poets' prose we have something not easily to be spared. If Newman is lost to verse, we can still boast sorrowfully of his splendour, for his marvellous eloquence springs from the fount of English song. Under his scarlet hat lie the green bays. In Newman we feel that we can

see prose transmuted, suffering a change, trembling on the verge of poetry in an attitude of daring equipoise, and about to take to itself wings. There is something finer than rhetoric in his best passages, something that only one who is a poet in fact if not in profession is able to handle. That same mystery and magic is in De Quincey's 'Levana' and 'Dream Fugue,' and also in Pater's 'Mona Lisa.' But as excerpts from these writings would be comparatively hackneyed, I will avoid them and quote instead from Hilaire Belloc's book on Danton, the chapter on The Fall of the monarchy. There is not quite the same effect of enchantment here as in the vaguer and more famous essays of the older writers, but only a man capable of producing 'The South Country' or 'Dives' could have chaunted: 'So perished the French Monarchy. Its dim origins stretched out and lost themselves in Rome; it had already learned to speak and recognised its own nature when the vaults of the Thermae echoed heavily to the slow footsteps of the Merovingian kings. Look up that vast valley of dead men crowned, and you may see the gigantic figure of Charlemagne, his brows level and his long white beard tangled like an undergrowth, having in his left hand the globe and in his right the hilt of an unconquerable sword. There also are the short, strong horsemen of the Robertian house, half-hidden by their leather shields, and their sons before them growing in vestment and majesty, and taking on the pomp of the Middle Ages; Louis VII.

all covered with iron; Philip the Conqueror; Louis IX., who alone is surrounded with light: they stand in a winding, interminable procession, this great crowd of kings; they loose their armour, they take their ermine on, they are accompanied by their captains and their marshalls; at last, in their attitude and in their magnificence they sum up in themselves the pride and the achievement of the French nation. But time has dissipated what it could not tarnish, and the process of a thousand years has turned these mighty figures into unsubstantial things. You may see them in the grey end of darkness, like a pageant all standing still. You look again, but with the growing light and with the wind that rises before morning they have disappeared.'

How near such a lyrical passage is to pure verse, how easily it can be converted into verse, was once shown by Francis Thompson when he translated a paragraph of one of his essays into strict stanza form. A few words dropped or added or transposed for the purpose of rhyme was all that was necessary. But this was only an exhibition of technical artifice : the paragraph gained no real improvement in the process. The greatness of prose heightened and coloured by poetry lies in the fact that the poetry remains *latent* in it. Even when struggling to escape she is unconscious of herself. The net holding her loveliness grows alive with light; her personality thrills along the webbing and saturates it with glory. But once the silken filaments are broken and their prisoner is free nothing

remains except a coarse coil of hemp—Poetry is not only released but annihilated, for a man has ravished her secret and revealed it to the world.

THE GUILD IDEA

IN these days when Capitalism with all its ugly attendant evils of Commercialism is being viewed with dismay, or at least apprehension, by those who are interested in the well-being of our society; when fierce and logical souls too often can find no escape save through the iron doors of a rigid collectivism; when (worst of all) many subtle minds are ready to be contented with reforms of a sort which can only make disease orderly—and perpetual—it can hardly be inopportune to consider if there is no solution for our desperate difficulties except the academic one or the bureaucratic one. Mr. Belloc has given us a powerful piece of steel-cold criticism and a phrase usually totally misunderstood by those who use it. 'The Servile State' does not mean in his book that Socialism will oppress men to the point of servile degradation, but that unless men strongly insist upon property as an absolute in their economic philosophy, the most well meaning attempts at reform will be diverted from the freedom which is their end into a softening but a strengthening of the plutocracy. There is no difficulty in seeing that this does actually happen, for recent bureaucratic legislation, while making for increased security in material things for the mass of our people, does, on

the other hand, distinctly lessen their spiritual status. Men are to be well housed, well clothed, well fed—for only by such means can a servile civilization be made endurable—but they are *not* intended to be more independent. Such a tendency is only possible because of a false philosophy among both social reformers and the proletariat. The Capitalists might, of course, be expected to be prepared to pay the price of the workmen's security and comfort—such a bargain would be extremely welcome to them—but even the philanthropists and the wage-earners think a man's being sure of his job, more desirable than a man's being sure of his soul. They hold, I believe correctly, that most men in our industrialised society would consider economic or even political freedom a small matter when set besides the certainty of regular employment, and a steady supply of beef, bread-and-butter and beer. The Fabians, if they are not the builders of the temple of social reconstruction, are certainly its architects. The Socialists have made the Servile State possible.

Even philanthropists are not so ignorant of men as to imagine that the desire for independence is other than normal to the human spirit. They are forced to their conclusion, not as to an ideal, but as to a compromise. They have ceased to hope for the Socialist 'nationalisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange,' and in order to be rid of the intolerable destitution incidental to the Capitalist system, are willing to accept any kind

of material amelioration of the poor, even though it should bring with it disabilities of another kind. They do not perhaps at first forget that a man should be free as well as fat, but hope that *embonpoint* will be likely to induce a desire and an aptitude for freedom. They consent to encourage the enregimentation of the poor in the hope that rations and drill will make soldiers strong enough to shoot their officers. Their psychology is at fault. The thin soldiers might shoot their masters in the courage born of desperation; but there are to be no thin soldiers in this army.

Since, then, the Servile State is only a bitter compromise, it is a matter for wonder that the Social Economists have not given more attention to an institution which, though still in process of development at the time when it fell, yet worked for several generations to the good of mankind. I refer to the Mediaeval Guilds. Brentano the Marxian, and other Socialists who have studied economic history, have written of the Guilds with sympathy and indeed admiration, but except in such quarters and among a few notably able minds, they have excited barely more than an archaeological interest.

What were the Guilds? How did they arise? How did they decay? Upon our realisation of the import of these questions and their answers the whole economic future depends.

Wilda and Brentano have, with characteristic German painstaking research, and with not a little of that equally German pompous pedantry, seen their origin in the sacrificial banquets of the ancient

Teutonic tribes; others in an extension and consolidation of the family ideas. That the family was the germ from which not only the guilds, but the tribe and the State arose, is of course obvious, and that with some form of human association social fellowship would be mixed must be taken for granted. But to insist too strongly upon the family germ or the feast is to reduce the guilds to being primeval prototypes of the Ancient Order of Buffaloes or the Convivial Company of Crocodiles, and to give an academic instead of a natural explanation of their rise. With far greater certainty we may believe with Mr. March Phillips that the real origin of the guilds was the habit men have of associating to repel depredation or attack. Such associations would be bound to feel an intimacy almost amounting to blood relationship. They would think of themselves as brotherhoods, and their family spirit would express itself in various social activities. Of definitely organised guilds in the modern sense perhaps the earliest of which we have certain record were those trading corporations and burial societies which existed from very early times among the Romans, among the Greeks, and even in India and China. The explanation of their origin, therefore, must be an universal one—that spirit of union and solidarity which is normal and native to the heart of man.

While this is so, nearly all the writers on the subject have recognised the enormous influence of the Church upon the development of the Guilds, and how the Faith informed them and gave them

vigorous life. The distinction which Toulmin Smith and Brentano have drawn between religious, social and trade fraternities, though natural to those who do not realise how completely religion can permeate every detail of human life, did not exist in fact. For though burial of the dead, loans for poor members and the provision of dowries for their daughters, sick benefit, plays and pageants (to mention a few of their secular activities) might be added to their main purpose as trade societies, yet suffrages for the dead, communal religious duties, the maintenance of a chantry priest, a lamp before the Blessed Sacrament and the like were so general as to warrant us in thinking that there were few religious guilds that did not have some worldly purpose; no trade guild that did not have its religious functions. The fact that each craft had its patron saint suffices to show this. And when the pillage began it was not easy to assign the guilds clearly in categories of 'religious' and 'secular,' where spiritual and material matters were so closely mingled. The Commissioners probably quite honestly did their best to make the division, and failed because men had not divided their lives into separate water-tight compartments. The Creed had coloured everything.

Accordingly, though as industrial corporations the guilds set themselves to protect their members against unfair competition, by disabilities upon traders from abroad or even from other parts of England, the Christian abhorrence of usury lay at

the core of their being. They regarded not only their rights but their duties.

Now usury did not mean in the ages of Faith merely miserliness, the dead accumulation of so much money, but was universally understood to include any seeking after profit beyond that which was needful to support a man and his family in their station in life. He who desired more than this was counted as avaricious, and the seeking of wealth as an end in itself as a sin. The rich were but the stewards of their riches, and had certain obligations towards the poor. Nor was avarice only an offence against religion; it could be and often was subject to condemnation by the civil authorities as an offence against the well-being of the State.

The current economic doctrine that 'money makes money' would have been abominable to the man of the Middle Ages. Land and labour were to him the two forces which in combination could be creative of wealth, and the dictum of Mr. H. N. Casson, 'Money is productive; property unproductive.' would have been shocking to his moral sense. To secure profit through the mere fluctuations in supply and demand would have been thought wrong: still more horrible the modern rigging of the market. Price to him was determined by the actual cost of production plus the maintenance of the producer. The modern theory is put, at all events lucidly, by Mr. H. N. Casson, who recently has set up a 'School of Efficiency' in London for the instruction of English business men in the economics of the

Devil. We have had the practice of the thing before, so perhaps it is good, for the sake of clarity, to have a confession of its philosophy.

'Intrinsic value has little to do with price. In all markets you will find a chaos of prices. It is not so much what the goods are, that matters. It is what the buyers are willing to pay.'

The condemnation of usury was not, as some would suppose who cannot understand the Mediæval objection to the system, an instance of archaic ecclesiastical restriction, but was bred in bones of the normal man, a universal hatred for something loathsome and obscene. Chaucer's Prioress spoke for her age:

> 'There was in Asia, in a greet citee,
> Amonges Christen folk, a Jewerye,
> Sustened by a lord of that contree
> For foule usure and lucre of vilanye,
> Hateful to Christ and to his companye.'

To-day usury is a word which is but rarely used, more rarely still with fit abhorrence. Indeed, not long ago a great London newspaper carried on a controversy as to whether 'The Merchant of Venice' was semitic or anti-semitic in intention and yet had only one, a belated contributor, who would mention the thing which the whole play was about. The word usury was not so much taboo as forgotten.

Against usury the guildmen set their faces like flints. Did an individual member of the fraternity attempt to outdo his fellow by cut prices or by shoddy workmanship, by misrepresentation as to his

goods, or by any other means?—Then punishment swift and drastic descended, as when, according to their record, the 'Pinners' craft heavily fined one of its members for selling Flemish as English pins. The mysteries had a commercial conscience, and in the words of Professor W. J. Ashley, 'The guild legislation kept steadily before itself the ideal of combining good quality and a price that was fair to the consumer, with a fitting remuneration to the workman.'

A word must be said as to price. In the early days of the crafts, the customer would engage the artificer to do a certain piece of work, paying him not by the day or hour but for the completed article, for which the customer would supply the material. Thus a man who wanted a coat would take his cloth to the tailor and bargain for the finished article, or the wood to the carpenter, who would undertake to supply a table. Later, with the development of trade, craftsmen made coats or tables, as they had time, for prospective customers, thus maintaining a regular supply of work. They began to employ journeymen and indentured apprentices. For the work done the bill would be made out somewhat as follows: Journeyman's or 'prentice's time (charged at actual cost), plus master's time (charged at a higher rate than that of his man, but never at more than double the rate), plus the cost of the material and other incidental charges. No profit was made upon material, except some small amount to cover the time spent in purchase, and no profit upon the

labour of his journeyman. To do otherwise would have seemed usurious to the master. Perhaps the spirit of the crafts may best be described in the words of a proclamation issued during the reign of Edward III: 'That so no knavery, false workmanship or deceit shall be found in any manner in the said mysteries; for the honour of the good folk of the said mysteries and for the common profit of the people.'

As, to quote Brentano 'England must be regarded as the birthplace of the Guilds, and London perhaps as their cradle;' and as in England their development was more in the nature of a gradual growth than on the Continent, where the conflict between the merchant guilds and the crafts was fierce and complete; and as in England, too, the effects of the cataclysm are more clearly to be seen than elsewhere, we can take the English guilds as typical of all the mediæval guilds, and study our subject to most advantage with them before our eyes.

In 1422, when the guilds had as full an organisation as they were destined to know, there were in London alone 112 separate crafts—brewers, fleshers, tailors, haberdashers, girdlers, weavers, fullers, dyers, tapicers, joiners, pewterers, braziers, chandlers, hatters, fishmongers, cheesemongers, mercers, beaders, armourers, vinters, grocers, ironmongers, cutlers, cordwainers, goldsmiths, tanners, blacksmiths, barbers, bakers, carpenters—but it would be tedious to enumerate the entire list. Their story is admirably told in Miss Helen Douglas Irvine's 'His-

tory of London.' The butcher, the baker and the candlestickmaker were worthy of their rhyme.

Though municipal government in England was not so absolutely in the hands of the guilds as it was in many towns on the Continent, especially in France, yet the laws of the commune and the crafts were very closely related. So that when in 1351, and again later in the century, the members of the Common Council of the City of London were elected by the leading guilds instead of by the wards it could be defended as a return to an earlier system.

But though the crafts did not usually directly govern, indirectly they certainly always controlled municipal affairs. Thus retailers had to be freemen of the city before they were allowed to trade in London, and freemen had to be proposed and elected by their guilds. Organised and vigorous were these communes, with a keen sense of political actuality and spirit and determination enough to make their influence felt. Miss Douglas Irvine relates how, when in 1269 the choice of the aldermen for Lord Mayor fell upon Phillip le Tayllur, the crafts shouted, 'We will have no mayor but Walter Harvey.' To the King at Westminster they went crying, 'We are the commune of the city and to us belongs the election of the mayor of the city, and we will that Walter Harvey be our elected mayor.' The struggle was sharp and blood was shed, but Harvey eventually became mayor.

How closely the town and the trades were connected may be seen from the frequent custom of

'common bargains' where the mayor had the option of purchasing commodities for the community. Town fisheries were often run on the same co-operative principle and even in some cases a town boat for merchant trading. A very different affair this from modern 'municipal socialism' (always procured at the price of an uproarious bargain for the capitalists) where the purchases never really belong to the community but to the financiers who are astute enough to put their fingers in the pie!

So the guilds grew. In the fourteenth century charters began to be given to the crafts. Then the Livery Companies arose with a corporate identity, common property, common liability and a common seal and with their own legal courts for the correction of their own misbehaving members. Yet it should not be forgotten that below the liveries and mysteries there lived many associations still in process of organisation which were not recognised by the authorities. They too were animated by the same strong and solid spirit, and might have developed to full stature.

If to the world at large the guild brought the certainty of a fair price and honest workmanship, and to its members protection against the dangers of external competition and internal roguery, the result was based upon and attained by the principle of mastership within the guild. A boy was apprenticed to a craft for seven, four, three or two years, according to the craft and the stage in its history, and became upon the expiration of his indenture a journeyman,

which he only remained until by habits of industry and thrift, or the fortunate chance of a marriage with his master's daughter, he could set up as a master himself. The relationship of the master to both apprentices and journeymen was roughly that of a father to his family. This status was not permanent because their normal expectation was that, when the legal bond of the apprentices had expired and capital and experience been acquired, they too would gain their independence and the full freedom of the guild. The modern workmen's economic philosophy is bounded by tolerable and secure employment and the wages envelope on Saturday; to the mediæval journeyman wages marked but a stage towards frugal and honourable independence. Sometimes there was even more to be gained, and many country folk of gentility but slender means sent their sons to seek fortune and advancement by way of the crafts. Not all turned again as Whittington, Lord Mayor of London, but many could count upon finding in the London crafts wealth and influence.

The organisation of rural districts was, necessarily somewhat different from that of the towns, but even here guilds, though existing, of course, for the protection of trade or manufactures, served many excellent economic purposes. They too had their guild halls and their parish chests and loans for poor or alms for sick and disabled members. And, as Professor Thorold Rogers says, 'Few parishes were probably without guild lands, from which the aged and the poor were nourished, till on the plea that

they were devoted to superstitious uses they were stolen under an Act of Parliament by Protector Somerset.'

Even Feudalism itself is still largely misunderstood. Serfdom had passed with the Dark Ages, and before the thirteenth century had arrived the Lord of the Manor could only demand his tenants to work upon the demesne land for a few days a week with some extra service at harvest-time and a couple of turkeys at Christmas. Even this (curtailed to a large extent by the holidays enforced by the Church) became very generally commutable by a regular money payment. In any case, the tenants always had their own holdings and their customary rights to the common lands.

Unfortunately these rights were too often *only* customary, and when it was seen that pasturage was more profitable than ploughed fields the lords, finding the prevailing system of scattered strips inconvenient with the change that had come over agriculture, enforced their rights and enclosed the commons. The legal question is obscure, for while the people could plead ancient custom the lords were able to use the law against a peasantry ignorant of its complexities and of the subtlety of lawyers. The process began before the Protestant Reformation, though had the Reformation not come it is probable that the movement would have failed. Certain it is that an immense impetus was given to the enclosures by the grasping hands of the defenders of the new faith.

The dissolution of the monasteries meant that whereas previously the rich owned and controlled barely a third of the land in England (the rest being widely, though unequally, divided among the mass of the population) they now had in their absolute possession over one-half. Two points should be noticed. First that the owners of the land in days when machinery and fixtures were of comparatively little value held infinitely more economic power with it than they could to-day. Secondly, that the Lords, who, when they held only a third of the land, could be kept in check equally by economic forces and by the power of the Church, now that their possessions were larger and their purpose more united than those of the rest of the nation, now that the restraining influence of religion had disappeared, were able to make extortions, of which they never dared to speak before. The ecclesiastical lands had been ruled indulgently by the abbeys and had set a standard for other manors. They now passed to those who had obtained them by rapine and who would be prepared to acknowledge few restraints in their administration.

To the plunder of the monasteries was added the plunder of the guilds. These corporations being immensely wealthy, but being also in a very real sense religious fraternities, had their funds and property confiscated to the Crown—where it could be shewn that they spent money on Masses for the dead or on any other such superstitious object! Edward the VI.'s Commissioners did, in fact, honestly attempt to

differentiate between secular and religious societies and recommended the authorisation of many trade guilds. These recommendations were not always acted upon, and even where the guilds were allowed to remain, heavy taxes were levied to their detriment. Such proceeds, and the rifled wealth of the Church, did not pass in any great extent to the Crown; few schools or hospitals or almshouses arose in consequence—though this more often happened in Germany and Denmark than in England—but the great lords and servants of the King steeped their hands in the blood of the poor, and in what Mr. Lloyd George now probably regrets to remember he called 'the fat of sacrilege.'

Many of the craft guilds lingered on oppressed by heavy taxation. But though the livery companies still remain (in name at least) in London to this day, the guilds gradually decayed. Economic forces were too strong for them; capitalism, crude and cynical, had entered into possession, and the mysteries were doomed. When the bond of their union was taken away their end was in sight. Religion was proscribed and a new false philosophy took its place. The keystone of the arch was knocked out, and the arch fell. Much has been written by many writers upon the spirit and organisation of the guilds and nearly all of it is sympathetic in tone. Hardly anyone has done more than Cardinal Gasquet to make the kindly past live again for us, but even he can find it in his heart to write, 'The system of these voluntary societies would be impossible and out of

place in this modern world of ours.' Everything which that great scholar says is of interest and importance, but if I cannot agree with him in this opinion, I have for my comfort the support of the *Rerum Novarum* of Leo XIII., which flings the guilds down as a challenge to industrialism.

'Some remedy must be found, and found quickly, for the misery and wretchedness pressing so heavily and unjustly at this moment on the vast majority of the working classes: *for the ancient working-men's guilds were abolished in the last century, and no other organisation took their place* . . . Hence, by degrees, it has come to pass that working-men have been surrendered, all isolated and helpless, to the hardheartedness of employers and the greed of unchecked competition. The mischief has been increased by rapacious usury, which, although more than once condemned by the Church, is, nevertheless, under a different guise, but with the like injustice, still practised by covetous and grasping men. . . So that a small number of very rich men have been able to lay upon the teeming masses of the labouring poor a yoke little better than that of slavery itself.'

That the idea of the guilds is not dead in current economic thought may be seen clearly enough by the eagerness with which one-time Socialists tumble over each other to declare themselves free from the taint of collectivism! Not only do they eschew Marx, but they unashamedly hanker after the guilds. For though Guild Socialism (or as it is now more correctly named 'National Guilds') and Syndicalism

are still some distance away from the old intimate and cosy idea of the mediæval guilds, they have come a very long way towards it. Both National Guilds and Syndicalism insist upon the doctrine that economic power precedes political power—in Mr. Orage's fine phrase, 'the political moon reflecting the light of the economic sun.' They would take care of the economic pence and let the political pounds take care of themselves. Both unite in denouncing the entanglement of the Trade Union movement in Parliamentary Labourism, pointing out with truth that Labour has never been so powerless as now when a strong Labour party sits in the House of Commons waiting to be bought by the caucus, the economic piper who calls the political tune!

In both of these systems the first step towards the abolition of wagery is 'the regimentation into a single fellowship of all these who are employed in any given industry.' The second will be the refusal of the watertight guild to work any longer for the profit of the capitalists. Though Syndicalism parts company with National Guilds here, the one demanding the absolute ownership of any given trade by the men of that particular trade, the other vesting all ownership in the State and acting merely as the State's trustee, each would agree that the transition could not take place 'without an intervening period of some form of partnership with existing capitalism.' The guild would not be a mere Trade Union, living with certain new rights under the old wage system, but a corporate body treating directly

in business and paying the members of the guild itself.

There is no space to treat the contents of that brilliant book, 'National Guilds' in detail here. I can only outline its thesis, note its tendency and offer a criticism.

Though its promoters very properly detest the modern passion for quantitative instead of qualitative workmanship (the only good work done to-day, as always, has been executed by men in small shops regarding themselves as artists rather than 'hands') the elephantine organisation of the proposed scheme, while it would undoubtedly add dignity to labour and economy to production, could hardly affect quality to a great extent. For *that* direct touch is necessary between the artist-craftsman and the customer. Moreover, the officials of a large organisation are notoriously safer from criticism and control than the officials of an organisation small enough to be open to the eyes of each one of its members. Then, too, a guild which only recognises corporate ownership would not satisfy the nature of man so completely as a guild such as those of the Middle Ages, which, while possessing its corporate identity, jealously guarded the property and the individuality of all its members.

Of course, no one imagines that the ancient guilds could work successfully in the modern world without very vital modifications. They did not die because they had served their day and were conquered by the industrial revolution which introduced steam machinery. They did not die on beds of disease,

but were slain in the open air. Had the Faith endured in England and the guilds with It, the crafts would unquestionably have adjusted themselves to new needs, using all that invention has introduced, not for mercenary profit but for human good. Capitalism was not (as the common theory runs) the child of machinery. The *Reformation* was its parent. But machinery coming in a capitalistic society enormously strengthened it, as it would just as certainly have strengthened the guild system had it found it then in possession of the field.

Can the guilds ever return? Well, I think not, until the world again accepts the Faith. Until then men seem likely to be ready for a purely materialistic contentment and unlikely to show any readiness to sacrifice for the gaining of what is in the last analysis a spiritual idea. The exhaustion of the acquired velocity of Catholic traditions is increasingly apparent, and we may with safety predict that unless 'some remedy be found and found quickly' society will inevitably harden itself into the capitalistic mould, legalising what has up to now been only customary, and perfecting the Servile State.

If we can only regain the true and ancient philosophy, clarity of vision and a determination to make our choice effectual, we can win back a free England and a merry England. The guilds will live full of their old genial and independent spirit, purified and strengthened by religion and coloured with our lost gaiety. If we will it we can have it, and see again the mysteries perform their plays on *Corpus Christi* and drink perhaps from a loving cup, for which an-

other Catholic Archbishop of York has obtained a hundred days indulgence . . . In this faith I mean to live and die.

'ROMAN AND UTOPIAN MORE'

'He who bore
King's wrath, and watched the sacred poor,
O Roman and Utopian More!'
CHARLES WILLIAMS, *The Wars.*

MORE is not only one of the problems of literature, but also of life. As M. Henri Bremond says of him, 'At first sight he is entirely profane.' Here is a pagan who kept his soul as an anchorite keeps his cell; a graceless satirist, to whom nothing was sacred, living a secret life of prayer and mortification possible only to a soul full of grace; a lawyer-politician with a hair shirt under his robes and chain of office; a Voltaire ready to go serenely to the lions! Doubtlessly there are some good men in Parliament, God-fearing and honourable citizens; but can we imagine even the humblest Secretary of State scourging his bleeding body in a silent room of Downing Street? Even if so wildly improbable a Saint existed in public life would he carry his heart with More's spirit of daring laughter? I fear that if such a man fasted, his press agency would see to it that the fact should be known. The trumpets would blow in the market-place—for the headlines declare the glory of the great, the journalists show forth their handiwork! Even opening a Church bazaar

is useful (and used) for the gaining of publicity. Such piety is always portentously pompous.

More, however, hid goodness under the cloak of good-fellowship, and his boon companions were not allowed to remark his austerity. The company who held their sides at his jests could hardly suspect that the jester's heart was abiding quietly with God. The cap and bells covered the Crown of Thorns. Gaiety goes so commonly with sanctity that it would be difficult to discover a Saint without it. But the mockery of More is another matter, and raises a stranger problem. Laughter, except among holy people, puts holiness at a discount, but the English wit covered up his piety, not only with hilarity (a disguise usually effective enough) but with railery, nay, almost with ribaldry.

It would be a psychological mistake so to analyse a man's character as to separate his intellect from his emotions, and if I point out the same paradox in More's intellectual as in his social life, I do so to show his unity. For the convenience of criticism, however, it might be well to note that More seemed to be a man of divided intellectual allegiance. In his mind irreconcilables agreed. Of all the humanists he was most human and most typical of his time. In him the Middle Ages and the Renaissance met and kissed each other. Great Latinist as he was, he wrote Greek better than Latin and thought in it better. The pagan poets and the Fathers of the Church shared the hospitality of his soul. He could turn from the reading of Lucretius to lecture in St.

Laurence Jewry on St. Augustine's "*De Civitate Dei.*' But his irony was so Greek in its spirit that he might have written Plato's sentence on a foolish disputant: 'I saw then, but never before, Thrasymachus blush, after he had acknowledged that justice was virtue and wisdom, and injustice was ignorance and vice.' Ruthless critic of ecclesiastical abuse as More was, his satire was never so severe that he was not ready to recall it should scandal arise. When changing circumstances had made the reading of the humanists' writings dangerous, he could say, 'In these days, in which men by their own default misconstrue and take harm out of the very Scripture of God, until men better amend, if any man would now translate *Moria* into English, or some other works, either that I have myself written on this, albeit there be none harm therein, folk yet being (as they be) given to take harm from that that is good, I would not only my darling's (Erasmus') books, but mine own also, help to burn them both with mine own hands, rather than folk should (though through their own fault) take any harm of them, seeing that I see them likely in these days so to do.'

To the making of More many things—all admirable—contributed. From the strict, honourable, though somewhat parsimonious house of his father, Sir John More, the judge, he passed at the age of fourteen to the palace of Cardinal Morton, the Chancellor; and of this kindly, shrewd and humorous old man he has given us an affectionate picture in the Utopia. Morton was wise enough to see genius

in the engaging boy who at his entertainments knew how to make more impromptu merriment than the professional players; and delighting in his wit, was in the habit of prophecying to his guests that 'This child here waiting at table, whoever shall live to see it, will prove a marvellous rare man.' With such encouragement and patronage More went to Oxford, which he left two years later at the age of eighteen, a finished scholar and the friend of the greatest scholar of the day. Not even early fame or the notice of such a man as Erasmus or the new heady wine of the Renaissance sufficed to take away from the brilliant youth a longing for the Cloister. What the Cathusians failed to win, the Franciscans nearly succeeded in snatching, and it was not until More was twenty-four that he married, acting upon the advice of Colet, his confessor. The young lawyer, returned at about this time to Parliament, soon made his mark, and though he had incurred the displeasure of Henry VII., the succession to the throne of his son opened out the path of success for the feet of the Saint. His public life is not the subject of this essay, so I will do no more than mention the fact that his ability as a lawyer and diplomat gained for him before he was fifty the summit of his worldly career, the office of Lord Chancellor. I am more concerned here with the man than with the politician; with the patient, pious, humorous saint and martyr, with the wit and philosopher, than with the diplomat whom Henry chose to pick his chestnuts out of the fire.

Throughout all these years of incessant and multifarious public concerns, More had been leading the humble and mortified life of an ascetic. Though he was the father of a family and the ruler of a large household, he managed by stealing time from the bed and table to write his books. When we remember his engrossment in public affairs, the demands of the King upon his leisure, and his habits of prayer, it is miraculous that so much should have been written. It could only have been accomplished by a man of the most regular life and sweetest temper. A wit is always in demand, and social intercourse with a king cannot be avoided—even in those rare cases where the wit desires to avoid it. But More, who found that being excessively popular in the Court had its drawback in the fact that he could never get home to his wife, moderated his gaiety in order to lessen the King's desire for his conversation. How this was done we do not know. It must have been a difficult and delicate piece of diplomacy that succeeded in gaining his release from the Court without giving offence. Even a king less intelligent or less ardent for amusement or less imperious than Henry would have had to have been managed with very careful tact under similar circumstances. But More gained his end and spent quiet days in Chelsea. There the affable Henry would come, inviting himself to dinner. But More, after walking in the garden with the King's arm round his neck—a mark of intimate royal friendship accorded only to himself—was shrewd enough to whisper in Roper's

ear his estimate of the favour of Princes. 'I find his Grace my very good lord indeed . . . howbeit, I may tell thee, I have no cause to be proud thereof, for, if my head would win him a castle in France (for then there was war between us), it should not fail to go.'

Not yet had the Grand Turk shown himself, and the future Chancellor was still basking in the sun of Henry's geniality. But he held his honours with a loose hand, for riches and public distinction were never sought by him. Dearer was his quiet scholarly life amidst his family, enlivened by an occasional visit from Erasmus, with its riotous evenings of jocular Latin conversation. Lady More must have felt rather uncomfortable in having to listen to the laughter which greeted jest and counter-jest in a language she did not understand: but Margaret Roper and More's other children, having been brought up on the classics, must have enjoyed the conversation of the hilarious scholars. Poor Lady More! The worthy, worldly, middle-aged, unimaginative woman was not quite the ideal wife for her husband. Yet of her, Erasmus, with whom she could hardly have had much in common, was able to say some words of rich praise, adding for the glory of More's considerate courtesy, 'He loveth his old wife' (she was his second) 'as well as if she were a young maid.'

In this atmosphere, full of unpretentious piety, and of decent domesticities, the 'Utopia' was written. Of the difficulties in the way of its composition the author speaks in the introductory letter to Peter

Gilles, when he begs pardon for the delayed manuscript. This intriguing work has been largely misunderstood, because of the difficulty of always being sure how much of it may be taken as representing More's own opinions. Other Utopians, Plato or Swift or Bellamy or Samuel Butler—with perhaps the exception of the last on this list—made their point of propaganda quite clear, and their meaning unmistakeable. But More, in the typical chapter on Utopian religion, does not always leave the reader certain as to whether he is speaking of the *ante* or *pre* Christian Faith of the happy kingdom. Twice he warns the unwary against too hasty a conclusion. 'For we have taken upon us,' he says, 'to show and declare their laws and ordinances, and not to defend them'; and again in conclusion, 'As I cannot agree and consent to all things that he (Hathloday) said. . . so must I needs confess and grant that many things be in the Utopian weal-public, which in our cities I may rather wish for than hope after.' The Utopia is so often misunderstood, I imagine, because not one out of ten of its readers know the 'Dialogue of Comfort.' In that book the speculative and apparently sceptical turn of More's mind is balanced by his explicit faith and confidence in God. *There* is the Utopia explained.

To me the amazing thing is the way in which the piercing modernism of More's political and economical criticism is controlled by the sobriety of his revolutionism. In the phrase about 'sheep eating men' with which he summed up the disaster of the

change which had come over farming when pasturage was substituted for tillage, and again in his condemnation of the rapacity of the rich and in his foreshadowing of collectivism, he was handling highly explosive stuff. But he would have men exercise moderation. 'If you cannot even as you would remedy vices, which use and custom hath confirmed, yet for this cause you must not leave and forsake the Commonwealth; you must not forsake the ship in a tempest, because you cannot rule and keep down the winds. . . But you must, with a crafty will and a subtle brain, study and endeavour yourself, as much as in you lieth, to handle the matter wittily and handsomely for the purpose, and that which you cannot turn to good, so to order that it may not be very bad.'

To the 'Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation' we must turn for the essential More. This, his last book, was written in the Tower during his imprisonment, and gains a tragic interest from that fact, and because during the latter part of the composition a piece of charcoal had to serve for pen. The high courage and constancy of the man are evident upon every page of the book; and its humorous sagacity and the knowledge we have that in it the actual process of consolation may be seen at work in the author's own soul, make it one of the most priceless of all writings. This is almost the only treatise on consolation that really does console, for there is nothing academic about More's spirituality. A monk, who is one of the most famous preachers of the day,

once assured me that if he had to be shipwrecked on a desert island with only one book, then that should be the 'Dialogue of Comfort.' And yet the volume is so neglected that a recent biographical dictionary of literature does not so much as mention it!

More was not a mystic, except in the secondary sense in which every Christian is a mystic. There are no raptures or visions in his experience; for though he belonged to the Middle Ages in his faith, his temperament had the classic rationalism of Greece. His devotion never soars very far from the earth, and had no extravagance or ecstasy. Acute, with the subtlety of the Renaissance, and sensible with the humorous common-sense of the English, his intellect bore the stamp of law and feared imaginative flights. To this strong soul consolation had to be reasonable, not emotional. He knew his danger to a hair's breadth and fought the legal battle for his head with all the forensic skill of the Law courts. He was under no illusion. The purpose of the King and the means of escape were as clear as daylight to his clear mind. True to himself, he went to the scaffold with many jests, but the transports of other martyrs were foreign to his nature. He balanced the gaining of the world against his soul—and gave a lawyer's verdict. The world, the flesh and the devil strove with their lonely antagonist and failed.

Three things stand out in the 'Dialogue.' The first is the close Presence of God, and upon that More builds. 'If you be part of His flock, and be-

lieve His promise, how can you be comfortless in any tribulation, when Christ and His Holy Spirit, and with them their inseparable Father, (if you put full trust and confidence in Them) be never neither one finger breadth of space, nor one minute of time from you?' Warring against this Presence are the treacheries of sin. It would not be easy to find a saint who has written more usefully upon the varied resources of the devil. His analysis of the sins of sloth and pusillanimity and scrupulosity and pride show a man who has met and recognised them in his own experience. Of riches—and More had been a moderately rich man—he has a special fear. 'Then were there, I ween, no place in no time since Christ's days hitherto, nor as I think in as long before that neither, nor never shall there hereafter, in which there could any man abide rich without the danger of eternal damnation, even for his riches alone, though he demeened it never so well.'

Above all, there shone from More during these last days the certainty of his Apostolic faith. The last word of a controversialist with the Lutherans was that when difference of religious opinion arose he would rather be on the side of the Saints. Speaking of Purgatory, he says, 'Though they (the Protestants) think there be none, yet since they deny not that all the corps of Christendom by so many hundred years have believed the contrary; and among them all, the old interpreters of Scripture from the Apostles' days down to our own time, of whom they deny not many for holy Saints, that I dare not now

believe these men against all those. These men must of their courtesy hold my poor fear excused, and I beseech our Lord heartily for them, that when they depart out of this wretched world, they find no Purgatory at all, so God keep them from Hell.'

Adamant as was his own conviction on the subject of the oath of supremacy, Sir Thomas More never made the slightest attempt to persuade any other man to his own way of thinking. The title assumed by the King of 'Supreme Head of the Anglican Church' had been qualified by the amending clause, 'So far as the law of Christ allows,' and many Catholics took what was then the defensible course of acknowledging it when accompanied by the qualification. More would never say that they were wrong to do so, but his reason and conscience forbade him the compromise. He weighed the evidence like the lawyer he was, and then went to his death for what seemed the trivial and pedantic point of a flaw in a title deed! Even when his judges sneered at him for having no wish to live, urging him to condemn the law outright, the prisoner would only add with a proud humility, 'I have not been a man of such holy living as I might be bold to offer myself to death, but God, for my presumption, might suffer me to fall.' Martyrdom was not of his own seeking, and the legal astuteness More displayed in the fight he made for life would have gained him acquittal from any but such a foresworn tribunal. Not until his sentence was passed did he break his reserve or explicitly declare his opinions.

With that relief to his soul the saint's old gaiety came back to him. To his judges, his wife, his children, even to his executioner he showed a manner oddly mixed of serenity and whimsicality. He went placidly to the scaffold, jesting all the way, and, having kissed the headsman, said the *Miserere* psalm, and received the martyr's crown from the hands of his Redeemer. Twenty years previously he had described the death-bed traditions of the Utopians: 'They think he shall not be welcome to God, which, when he is called, runneth not to Him gladly, but is drawn by force and sore against his will. They therefore that see this kind of death do abhor it, and them that so die they bury with sorrow and silence.'

There is a strange consistency about this man. His complexity lay only in the subtlety of his intellect; his motive was always single. Without the impetus of romanticism or enthusiasm his integrity remained steadfastly unshaken. Out of Holbein's canvas he looks at us, wearing his habitual ironic smile; at once the greatest and the most homely Englishman of his age; the satirist who is the plain man's saint.

THIS GREEN PLOT SHALL BE OUR STAGE

FOR the temper of a period, for the roots and the motives of its historical life, a ballad will often convey as much as a battle, a drinking song as the dooms of a dynasty, or the wanderings of a troubadour as the wanderings of a tribe. When men are taken off their guard, as they are and not as they want to appear, a tale may be the key to many a Court chronicle. Even in our own age England speaks, not in the Houses of Parliament, but in the public houses. Knowing the songs of a nation we need not bother to learn its laws. If this is true even in cases where there have been careful historians at work, it is still truer of the Middle Ages, where to a great extent our knowledge of its mind has come to us in stray and apparently trivial forms, through parish accounts, wills and guild rolls. Much of the foolish disdain which men learnt from the text-books has been dispelled by archæologists digging out from old holes and corners small but vivid proofs of the riches of the lost civilization.

Hardly in any way can the Middle Ages be better tested than by their amusements: and of the record of these, though much has been lost, enough has

been fortunately left to enable us to reconstruct the spirit of the time. We know now what epic entertained the Baron in his castle, what play moved a peasantry upon a holiday; we know the sort of adventures which thrilled them, the sort of jokes at which they laughed, and knowing these things we become free of their ancient and friendly company. The wife of Bath, and the Miller, and the Friar, the Prioress and the rest of their peers (never very sour or lacking in comradeship, one would think!) unbend to us. We may travel with them an we will. However, it is for the moment our purpose to ride not to Canterbury, but to Chester, Coventry and York.

Anyone consumed with the modern passion for 'origins' would pick out the plays of the *Suffering Christ* attributed at one time to St. Gregory Nazianzen, and trace the definite descent of the great cycles through Hrotsvitha, and the French play of *Adam*, to the *Harrowing of Hell* and the beginning of our religious drama. Now the first mentioned play is written in deliberate imitation of classical models, whereas mystery plays mark a new beginning. Such literary influence as was felt came more directly from the *chansons de geste* of the wandering minstrels. No art had, in the Middle Ages, a style for ecclesiastical use distinct from that in vogue for secular needs. Churches were Gothic, because Gothic was the best style, for a barn as for an abbey. Plain chant was the popular mode in music, and was employed (with the necessary modifications) not only

for the Divine Office but for comic songs. The Salvation Army to-day is alone in having this popular spirit, though with this vital difference: its inspiration derives from secular things; in the Middle Ages secular things are informed by religion. Society was one whole of body, soul and spirit working together. The plays really began quite simply and spontaneously from the desire every man remembers from his childhood for 'dressing up' and impersonation. Even if dramatic art had become completely forgotten somebody would have invented it, casually and without realising or demonstrating his originality. The liturgy of the Church has always been largely representational, as indeed is the ritual of every religion, and an effort arose to make the symbolical explicit. Accordingly plays upon the life and death of our Lord were written, in Latin since they were appendices and explanations of the services of Holy Week, and acted either in the Church or in its porch as a link with worship.

But with the simultaneous growth of their enormous popularity and of a vernacular poetry, the plays had eventually of necessity to leave the church building for the streets of the town. When, in 1264, the feast of *Corpus Christi* was established, and became at once a sublime pageant illustrative of the whole meaning of the Faith, a series of minor pageants naturally followed, dramatic representation of divine things which served equally to edify and amuse the Faithful. The actors attended Mass and walked in the great procession of the Blessed Sacrament

and, their religious duties fulfilled, began the plays, setting forth the Christian's conception of the working of Providence and the end of man.

> This play forsooth begin shall he
> In worship of the Trinity.

Portable stages were erected at their several stations and the artists commenced their entertainment. How full a day's pleasure was offered may be gauged from the fact that at York there were no less than fifty-four distinct plays! Here would the shipwrights show Noah building an ark, there the vintners the miracle of Cana. While the goldsmiths were acting the adoration of the Kings, the bakers would represent the Last Supper—each guild as far as possible being concerned in some work which demonstrated not only the Glory of God, but the worth and skill of its own craftsmen.

Holiday humour was abroad, and devotion became mixed and mingled with uproarious jocularity, so much so that at times the *motif* of the play became lost for very exuberance of hilarity. Noah came near drowning not of water but of wit. He almost forgot that he had built an ark in his desperate attempt to get his wife away from her gossips.

> For at a time thou drinkest a quart
> And so will I ere I go.

The whole scene is one of rollicking comedy, down to the instant when, saved in the nick of time, she turns round upon her husband and (as the stage directions put it) *Dat alapam victa*! Many of the jests were direct and not a little broad. The theme

of the trials of the married man was always turning up, and the good old jokes were always welcome. Local and family gibes delighted the audience concerned, but though such allusions are necessarily lost upon us there is enough of universal as opposed to accidental humour, in most of these plays, for us to imagine the roars of laughter which would greet each fresh sally of Noah's wife or of the dreadful but ridiculous *Sathanas*. Yet in the famous Wakefield nativity play, after an absolute *crescendo* of humour, after the stolen sheep had been put to rest in the cradle and the audience had laughed its fill, came some of the tenderest and most touching pathos in the whole of literature.

Haylle, sufferan savyoure, for thou has us soght:
Haylle, frely foyde and floure, that alle thyng has wroght.
Haylle, fulle of favoure, that made alle of noght!
Haylle! I kneylle and I cowre. A byrd have I broght
To my barne.
Haylle, lytylle tyné mop,
Of oure crede thou art crop:
I wold drynk on thy cop,
Lytylle day starne.

Haylle, derlying dere, fulle of godhede,
I pray the be nere when that I have nede.
Haylle! swete is thy chere: my hart wold blede
To se the sytt here in so poore wede,
With no pennys.
Haylle! put furthe thy dalle,
I bryng the bot a balle:
Have and play the with alle,
And go to the tenys.

The proscription of the Catholic Faith dealt a very heavy blow to this popular religious drama. In many places the guilds kept the paraphernalia of their art, the 'jaws of Hell,' the 'coat of the Holy Ghost' and the 'crown of our Lady,' and the like, in the hope of a revival which never came. Soon they had passed and were forgotten in the full and conscious glory of the Elizabethan drama. Rustic plays and pageants of a sort lingered on in spite of puritan disapproval, and these, rather than the nobler and more beautiful work of Catholic England, were burlesqued by Shakespeare in Quince, the carpenter, Snug, the joiner, Bottom, the weaver, Flute, the bellows-mender, Snout, the tinker, and Starveling, the tailor. Shakespeare's parody, however, is probably touched to great extent with the professional's supercilious contempt for the amateur. Crude though the old plays may have been, there was much deep humour in them and a homely grace which had gladdened many a simple heart.

A SECRET ENGLAND

THE first sight which greets a traveller reaching Bosham is a railway station and a row of dismal red-brick houses disappointing to the eyes and the soul that had looked for better things. But if the visitor perservere, a long, winding lane will bring him out suddenly upon one quiet straggling street, with the church and the quay at the end and the brown broads beyond. When the tide is out the fishing-boats wallow shamelessly in the grey mud which seems to be everywhere; at other times Bosham is serene and complete in its beauty.

I arrived in the company of a friend with whom I had beguiled the weary miles in argument as to the right pronunciation of the name of our Mecca. Hailing as he did from Streatham, he might have been expected to know better than to have insisted upon the word being Bosh-am. It was in vain that I protested against such a disregard of etymology, and pointed out that just as Horsham is the Ham of the Horse, so Bosham is obviously the Ham of the Bos—whatever the Bos may be. No conviction came until he had enquired the way to 'Bosh-am' of a fringe-bearded Sussex labourer who directed him unequivocally to Bos-ham! Whereupon I strode on in triumph.

To find lodgings was not easy; for in the summer artists swoop down with palettes and easels to take possession of all the thatched cottages. But by the gifts of sundry pennies to small boys we were at last taken to a good woman, who, having eyed us with intense disapproval, and after consultation with some invisible power, according to the slow local manner, agreed to give us what we needed.

The bacon and eggs and beer being disposed of, we lit our pipes and strolled out to see what we could in the dusk. The artists had all gone home to roost, and though we saw them in the morning, each surrounded by his circle of rustic or seafaring critics, yet for this one still hour we sat on the low sea-wall and watched the sun set over by Chidham and the fishing boats grow more and more shadowy in the darkness; while behind us the low spire of the church pushed upwards through the trees. We smoked in strong silence for a time, then stretched ourselves, knocked the ashes out of our pipes, and walked back to bed.

In the morning, after a bathe in delicious nakedness from the deserted quay, we set out to see the village more closely, and finding it a place full of old runes and memories of our race, I propose setting some of these things down for you.

Bosham, in a way now exceeding rare in England, has its life centred in the church, which digs its roots so deeply into the past as to have been founded upon the ruins of a Roman basilica. Tradition has it, indeed, that Vespasian, as general of the second

legion, built a house here for himself, which, in view of Bosham's proximity to the Roman camps and road, is just probable. Be that as it may, the Roman foundations of the church are authentic enough.

In the seventh century came Dicul, a monk from Ireland with half a dozen brothers in religion, who made, according to the Venerable Bede, 'a very small monastery' here, but whose earnest labours were utterly fruitless, for the whole of the kingdom of the South Saxons was ignorant of the name and faith of God.' Bede continues with the story of its conversion by the preaching of St. Wilfrid. 'Bishop Wilfrid, by preaching the Gospel to this race, not only rescued it from the misery of everlasting damnation, but also from an unutterable calamity of temporal destruction. For three years before his coming into the province, no rain had fallen in those parts, in consequence of which a very severe famine overtook the people and cut them off with a horrible death . . . On the very day, however, on which this people received the baptism of the Faith a gentle and plentiful rain fell. The earth revived and the field grew green; the season became pleasant and fruitful. . . Besides, the Bishop, when he had come into the province and had seen there such great sufferings from hunger, taught them to obtain food by fishing. . . By this kindness the Bishop won over the hearts and affections of all, and soon they began to hope more readily for spiritual blessings from his preaching, since by his agency they had obtained earthly blessings.'

Not very long after, for its body and several of its pillars and doors are of unmistakably Saxon origin, a church arose, the first in this part of the country, whose benefice subsequently became one of the richest in England. It figures in the second scene of the Bayeux tapestry where Harold, on the first stage of his disastrous journey to Normandy, is riding from London very splendidly with his thanes, a hawk on his wrist and his hounds leaping in front. The inscription reads: —

UBI HAROLD DUX ANGELORUM ET SUI
MILITES EQUITANT AD BOSHAM.

Two men, crossing themselves, I should judge, are depicted entering the church, which, since it is not in the least like the real Bosham church, and has no tower, is conveniently labelled: —

ECCLESIA.

To this very church Wulff, the son of Sweyn, and his Danes, came once, sailing up to the harbour in their long galleys, and finding nothing of value except the great bell (for Bosham was very poor in those days) they took that with them upon their ships. But behold a miracle! for the pirates had not gone far down the Channel when the deck opened (some say by the intervention of St. Nicholas) and the bell dropped into the hold. Then the deck closed again and the bottom of the ship gaping to allow its passage, the bell sank sheer in a place known as Bell Haven or Bell Hole, where it lies to this day. And whenever the bells ring from the tower of the

church, the ravished tenor still booms in unison from the deep.

A later legend tells how the only way of raising the lost bell was by drawing it to land by a team of seven milk-white oxen. Some years ago, the story runs, this was tried; and three times the bell rose to the surface and three times fell back again. In desperation the oxen were re-examined; but from their soft, wet snouts to the tips of their long tails no hair not pure white could be found. So for six; but (alas!) upon the seventh an inspection revealed one black hair!—and that, of course, explains the failure to raise the bell.

But how shall I tell more of Bosham, or of the evil deed that Swegen, Harold's brother, did there when he took Biorn, the nephew of Canute, and slew him in Arun-Mouth, or of Herbert de Bosham, the faithful friend and biographer of St. Thomas of Canterbury, or of Canute, who forbade the tide to come further, sitting in his chair on Bosham mud? What pleases me even more is to think of that priest who was disturbed at his Mass at the high altar by his brawling colleague at Allhallows altar hard by, who, after many appeals for a more softly-sung *sursum corda*, became at last so incensed as to stride down and punch the disturbing cleric's head—being fined twopence for so doing by the ecclesiastical court.

The present vicar, Mr. K. H. MacDermott, reverently guards the local traditions, and it is to his courtesy and the scholarship contained in his book

on Bosham, that I owe much. But a vicar of another sort, a certain disreputable William Kilwick, from 1800 to 1838, held the living and a chestful of ancient records. 'For the documents themselves,' as Mr. C. J. Longcraft writes, 'in a literary or archæological point of view, the vicar cared not a rush . . . but there was an impression on his mind that in some way or other, an increase of tithe might be gleaned from the contents of the chest; and whenever it happened that anyone having, or professing, an acquaintance with the writing of departed centuries came in the way of the vicar, he sent, as a matter of course, for a batch of the papers, and they were thereupon examined over a pipe and a jorum of the vicar's ale.' Tom Kervel, however, his parish clerk, became so disgusted at being ordered to fetch what he considered a lot of mere rubbish at all hours and the most unreasonable weathers, that he determined to burn them—and did.

And though with the last grey embers went so much of the recorded past, the spirit of England, and especially of South England, sits in Bosham deathless still.

> 'The heathen kingdom Wilfred found
> Dreams, as she dwells apart,'

quiet and kindly and full of old memories by the Sussex sea.

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